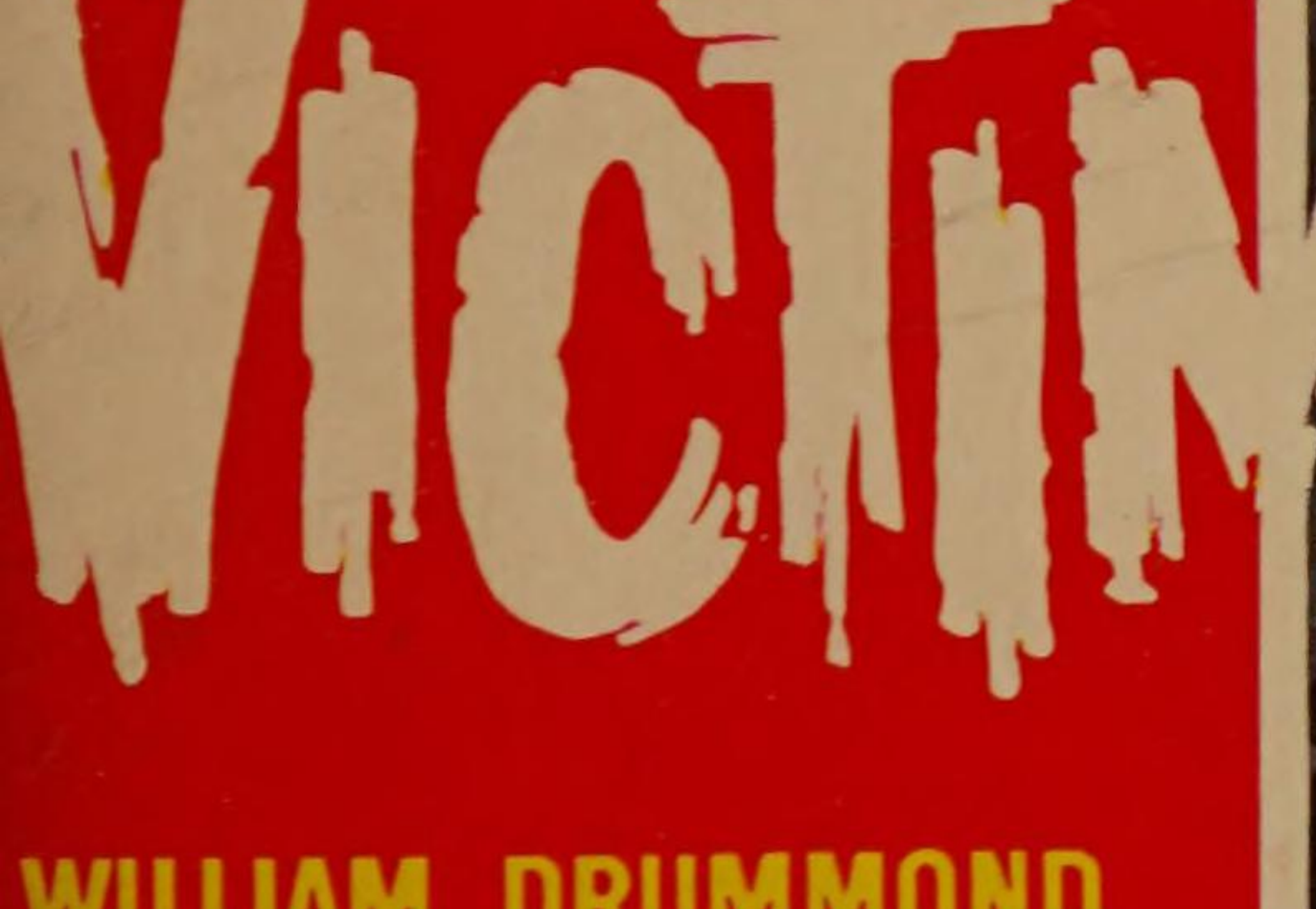
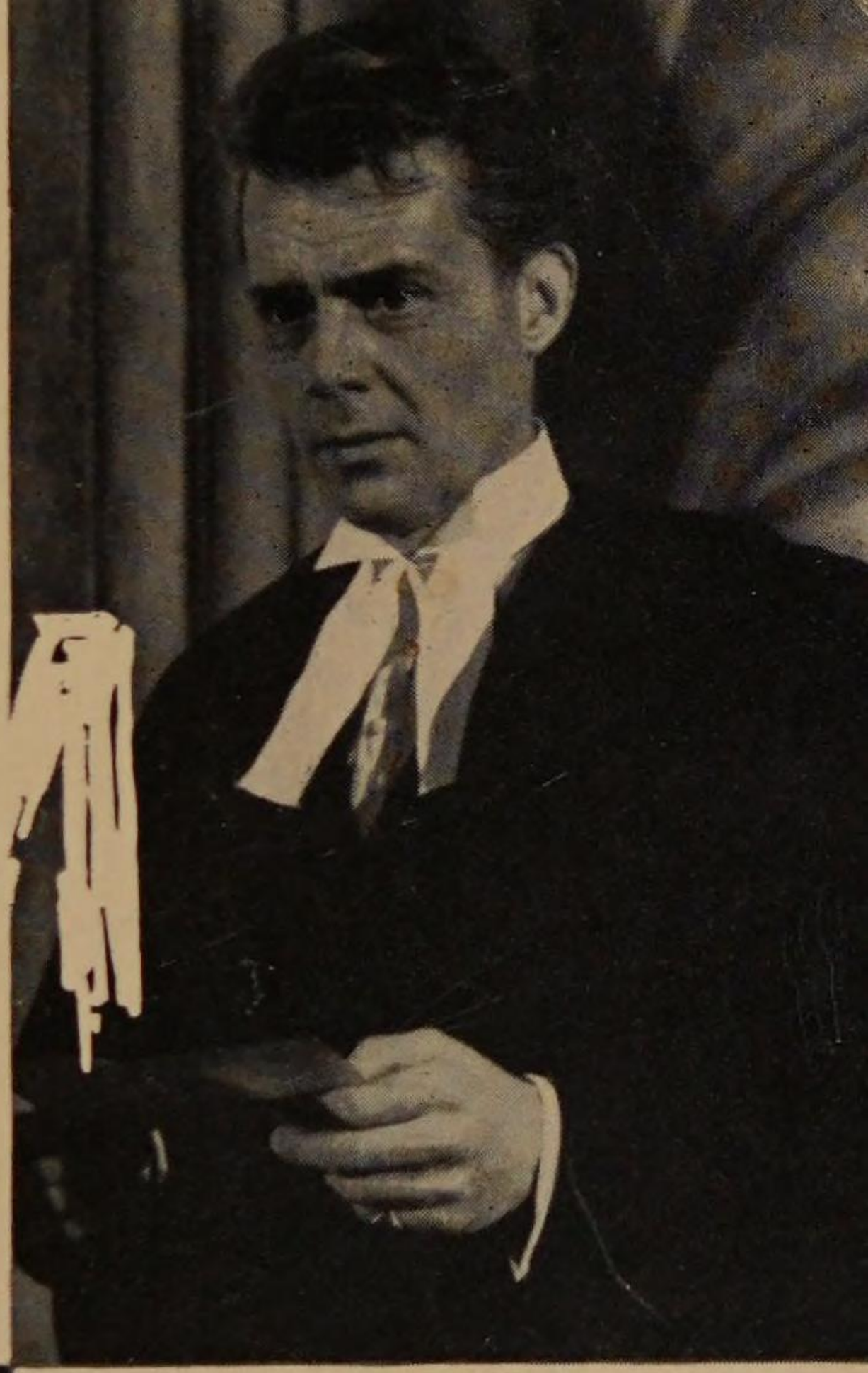
CORGI BOOKS

VICTIM

WILLIAM DRUMMOND





Why did Jack Barrett commit suicide? And what ugly secret threatened the career of Melville Carr?

Allied Film Makers present Dirk Bogarde and Sylvia Syms in "VICTIM" also starring Dennis Price. Produced by Michael Relph. Directed by Basil Dearden.

2/6

BLACKMAIL...

is the subject of this novel. It is also a story of suspense, warmly human and absorbing, moving in a world different in every way to that which the average person considers normal.

Jack Barrett is a likeable young man, involved so deeply with the law on one side and the blackmailers on the other, that he commits suicide. His death sparks off an investigation which brings into the limelight many prominent people, all of whom have one thing in common: they are homosexuals.

For Melville Carr, a successful barrister, this is a crucial moment. Now, in deciding to help the police in their search for the blackmailers, he is putting his career in jeopardy —for he must reveal that he too was once a homosexual.

WILLIAM DRUMMOND

VICTIM

Adapted from the original
screenplay by Janet Green
and John McCormick

TRANSWORLD PUBLISHERS

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VICTIM

A CORGI BOOK

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ALLIED FILM MAKERS

present

"VICTIM"

Produced by Michael Relph

Directed by Basil Dearden

From the original screenplay

by

Janet Green and John McCormick

Dirk Bogarde	as	Melville Carr
Sylvia Syms	as	Laura Carr
Dennis Price	as	Calloway
Peter McEnery	as	Jack Barrett
Donald Churchill	as	Eddy
John Barrie	as	Det.-Inspector Harris
John Cairney	as	Bridie
Barry Raymond	as	Constable Adams
Noel Howlett	as	Patterson
Frank Pettitt	as	Fred
Mavis Villiers	as	Madge
Charles Lloyd Pack	as	Henry
Hilton Edwards	as	P.H.
David Evans	as	Micky
Anthony Nicholls	as	Lord Fullbrook
Margaret Diamond	as	Miss Benham
Norman Bird	as	Harold Doe
Nigel Stock	as	Phil

PART ONE

VICTIM 2. A person who is put to death or subjected to torture by another.

Oxford English Dictionary.

CHAPTER ONE

SHOWDOWN

Jack Barrett was on the Mountford job when it happened.

He was on the fifth-floor scaffolding checking Len's time, when he looked down and there was the black car with the radio mast and the blue light and the screamer drawing out of the nearside traffic over the sleepers and his heart fell into his bowels and he thought 'This is it.'

"O.K. Len," he said. "Be seeing you."

As Barrett jumped on the hoist and pulled the lever, he saw old Len, looking daft with surprise. And then he looked below and the car was creeping down into the excavations towards the foreman's shed, going slowly because the sleepers were loose. 'But I won't be seeing you, mate,' he thought. This was the showdown. The agony was over, the nightmares, the waking in the dawn with a sweat of fear.

The car stopped by the foreman's shed and first one copper got out and then thank God! the other did and without a glance up at the hoist they both went into the shed.

Barrett grasped the safety bar. The hoist seemed to be travelling at a snail's pace. How long would Nobby keep them waiting? Liked to play God Almighty he did. But not with coppers. No sir, not with cops.

He threw back the safety bar and poised, watching the nearing ground, the shed, the ground, the shed. Jump too

soon, sprain your ankle and you do their job for them. Fourteen foot, twelve foot, ten.

As Barrett jumped, the duffle coat ballooned about him. His heels hit the crush of frozen earth and went through to the slush beneath. As he steadied himself, mud oozed into his shoes. He saw the door of the foreman's shed open and scuttled behind a pile of bricks, stood hidden to take his bearings.

Hutch was on the scoop and Nobby called to him, "Seen Barrett around?"

"I seen him go up aloft, Mr. Clark," Hutch said. "Shall I give 'im a shout?"

There was a lot of clobber on the basement floor, thank God! He could give them a run. But that wouldn't save Mel, with that stuff in his digs. Not unless he got away.

He didn't hear what the coppers said, but the hoist started to rise and when he peeped round the bricks there was no sign of any of them. Nobby was taking them both up; afraid if they called, he'd try to scarper. Barrett grinned.

Hutch had his back to him and there was no one else in sight. Threading his way among the clobber of the basement, moving quietly as if he was on some job he reached the ramp to street level. Joyce was on the gate. He looked surprised to see Barrett appear up the steep side of the ramp.

"You bin nippy," he said. The time-sheets usually took the best part of an hour.

"I'm feeling rotten," Barrett said. "Sort of 'flu."

"No, you don't look too good," Joyce said. "Bed's the best place."

Barrett nodded. "Going to get a bus." There were crowds of people waiting for the lights to change and he

joined them and crossed in the thick of them, making for the bus-stop.

When he was out of sight, he turned into Woolworth's and made his way through the crowd to the emergency exit at the back. It was into a little side-alley and he walked quickly down this, making for the Thames.

If the coppers asked Joyce—and they *would* ask—if he had seen Barrett leave, they'd make straight for Jerome Street. And if they did, he realised with horror, they would find the clippings, the moment they searched his room. And he couldn't beat them back there.

Eddy.

If Eddy was in!

He looked round for a telephone box. Not a sign of one. At a station. Which? Temple? Charing Cross? Temple was nearer and he started running towards it. Then he saw a bus going west. If he could get to the stop in time, Charing Cross would be quicker by bus. But suddenly the lights changed and the Embankment traffic streamed east cutting him off from the bus stop. He gripped his fists waiting for an opening while the west-bound bus came steadily towards him.

There *was* a gap. He dashed across the road to the island. There was a screech of brakes and the driver swore at him as he passed. The copper in the traffic control box was looking at him as if he was crazy.

Now a stream of eastward traffic blocked the road. He couldn't cross. The bus passed. He ought to go back. But if he did, the traffic copper might warn him for jay-walking, ask for his name, at any rate waste time.

He crossed to the Embankment. If only he'd started straight for Temple Station, he would have been half-way

there by now. A fine sleet struck him in the face, but he welcomed it. It gave him an excuse to run without attracting attention.

How long would it take the police car to get to Jerome Street? A quarter of an hour? Twenty minutes? Twenty-five? It was hard to say, without you knew the traffic.

He glanced back. He was well out of sight of the police lights and the road was clear. Barrett ran back to the north-side, and kept on running in the sleet till he reached the station.

He was in luck. A kiosk was empty. He went in and felt in his pocket. He had only three pence in coppers. He went out and looked round. There was a queue at the ticket office, but the tobacconist was open. A man was buying some cigarettes. Barrett went and stood behind him.

"Trouble is," the man said, "she says what she thinks."

The woman behind the counter scratched the tip of her nose with the nail of her little finger, "But does she think what she says?" she asked.

"Ah," said the man, "That's a horse of a different colour."

"Not like Ivy," the woman said.

The man laughed. "Not a bit like Ivy."

"Excuse me," Barrett said.

Neither had taken any notice of him until this moment. Now they turned as if he were guilty of the grossest rudeness.

"I want a box of matches and four pennies please," Barrett said, "I want to phone."

"Only got ha'pennies," the woman said. "Try the ticket office."

The queue had disappeared, but as he went to the ticket office he saw someone go into the telephone box. He changed a shilling and by the time he went back there was a couple of people waiting. They stood outside the boxes, watching the people inside. There was a girl chattering her head off. When she stopped talking, she stood with her legs crossed, biting her lip to prevent herself interrupting. In another box was a man 'hanging up'. He said nothing at all, but passed the time cleaning the nails of the hand holding the receiver with a match. After a time he changed hands.

Jack Barrett looked at the clock. It was eleven-seventeen. Eddy usually went out at eleven twenty-five to buy a racing Standard and work out his bets at the Chequers. Or sometimes he went to the Footman. Barrett didn't know either of these numbers and he looked to see if there was a place to consult directories outside the telephone boxes.

There wasn't.

The man, who had finished cleaning his nails, pressed Button A. The time was eleven twenty-two and he took out a notebook and began to read something across on the telephone. Perhaps it was his bets for the day, perhaps it was some order. The girl laughed and pulled up her right stocking.

"I'm in a frightful hurry," Barrett said.

"So am I," said the man who was waiting in front of him. "I've got to catch a train."

"Then why don't you telephone from the other end?" asked Barrett.

"Because I'm going to Peebles," the man snarled.

The woman in front of him, who reminded Barrett of his mother, only nicer, turned round and said, "You can have my place, boy."

"I'm next after you," snarled the man.

"No," said the woman, "this young man and I are swapping places."

At that moment the girl came out of the telephone box and while the two in front of him were arguing, Barrett occupied it. "Thanks, mum," he said as he passed.

He dialled his number and waited, listening to the ringing tone. The man in the next box put down the receiver and Barrett saw the man who was going to Peebles start forward. But the man in the next box inserted four more pennies and dialled another number.

The ringing tone went on. Then it stopped. "This is Cosifoam at your service," a voice said.

"I want Fulham 43851"

"This is Cosifoam at your service."

Barrett replaced the receiver and lifted it again.

"Cosifoam at your . . ."

He jammed it back savagely.

The man in the next box removed a match from his ear and looked at it. The dialling tone came on. Barrett dialled again. The man who was going to Peebles was looking at his watch. The time on the clock was eleven thirty-one.

"Hallo. What are you wanting?" Mrs. Pascoe said.

Barrett pressed Button A. "Would there be a Mr. O'Donovan in the house?" Barrett asked, using his Irish voice.

He heard Mrs. Pascoe shout. "Eddy! Eddy! It's for you, lad."

"Who is it?" Eddy shouted.

"I dinna ken his name," Mrs. Pascoe said, "You take it yourself."

"Hullo," Eddy said. "Who's that speaking?"

"It's an old Oirish buddy o' yourn," Barrett said. Then in a whisper. "Listen Eddy, it's Jack. I'm in a fix. About as bad as can be. Speak Oirish, for God's sake."

"Sure, boyo," Eddy said, "and what're you wanting?"

"In my room," Barrett said, "bottom drawer of the chest, under the pullovers, you'll find an envelope. Put it in the hold-all under the bed. Bring it to the Chequers. I'll be waiting. This is life or death, Ed."

"Sure, boyo. Mooney's house in Oxford Street," Eddy said. "An' you tell me how ould Dublin is."

In the box next door was the man going to Peebles. The nice woman was still waiting outside. "May I make another call, Mum?" Barrett asked.

"I can't spare the time dear," she said, "I must ring my daughter; she's expecting her baby any moment—sorry."

Barrett walked out.

There was a copper on the Embankment.

He knew there couldn't be that sort of alert—yet. But he walked to the ticket office. "Sloane Square, please," he said.

He got out at Charing Cross, changed to the Bakerloo, changed again at Piccadilly Circus on to the Piccadilly and got out at Green Park station.

At Green Park there was a telephone box empty. He went in and dialled Temple Bar 89543. A voice said, "Hogg, Hastings and Carr."

"Could I speak to Mr. Carr?"

"I'm afraid he's in Court. But Mr. Patterson, his clerk, is here. Would you like to speak to him?"

"When will Mr. Carr be back?"

"I don't know whether he will come back after Court."

"But he'll be having dinner at the club?"

"Dinner?"

"I mean lunch."

Barrett knew enough to be sure that he had made a terrible mistake. The high clear voice at the other end, so very upper-crust, showed it. "If you would explain your business, Mr. . . . "

"It's personal. But very urgent. Please tell him if he comes in, that it really is . . . it really is . . . well, a matter of life and death."

"If you would give me a number where I could ring you back, Mr. . . . You still haven't given me your name."

"Barrett," Jack said. "But I haven't got a 'phone. Tell him I'll ring back. Tell him I'm on the move."

"Mr. Barrett," said the girl reading back her notes, "Is on the move. Will call later. It is urgent. Is that all?"

"No," Barrett said. "Say it concerns him *intimately*."

"Iintimately?"

"I don't want him to be ruined," Barrett said. "That's the last thing I want."

"I'm glad to know that, Mr. Barrett," Miss Slingsbee said. "But I shouldn't worry, if I were you."

Melville Carr put down the extension. "My congratulations, Priscilla. Very delicately handled."

"But you *are* going to lunch at the club."

"Clubs have been coping with situations like this, since the time they were coffee houses," Melville Carr said.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRIVACY OF BURKE'S

Whenever he was in London, Melville Carr lunched at Burke's. The chef was good and the company better. "If you prefer to eat with Bishops," Scott Hankin said, "the Athenaeum's the place. But when Bishops bicker, they do so unprofitably, in Consistory Courts or the Church Council." For real legal business Burke's was best. The descendants of the old family companies which had grown gradually over the last two hundred years, buying piddling little businesses in Bermondsey and Deptford to process shoes and ships and sealing wax, the old Etonian merchant princes and bankers, belonged to Burke's. To belong was worth its hundred guineas a year subscription (deductible from income tax), especially as so many legal members of the Club had become High Court Judges as their arteries began to harden. Then, the children launched, fame beckoned more invitingly than fortune.

Melville Carr lunched as usual at Burke's. In the bar he met Lord Fullbrook, a good friend who, as Scott Hankin said, dealt in everything from guano to Guatemala. He had small taste but enormous gusto, flying to Le Touquet partly because he was an ardent amateur pilot but also because his wife hated flying. "One wants a change," Fullbrook would say, winking. "And in going away, one gives the other party a change too." From the rumours which were current, Lady Fullbrook took full advantage.

"No good for me, though," Scott Hankin said. "She takes a small size in men."

With Fullbrook was Paul Mandrake, not one of Carr's favourite people. Paul was a top-flight commercial photographer with the eye of an artist and the soul of a prostitute. He was the man who brought surrealism to the two-way stretch and the glossies loved his work. He was extremely clever; film stars were flattered to be photographed by him, but Carr could not stand those large rolling eyes and the mocking defensive humour. "Have you seen Paul's show?" Fullbrook asked.

"Not yet," Carr said, meaning 'not on your life'.

"You must," Fullbrook said. "It's most amusing. Where do you get all those props from, Paul?"

Mandrake shrugged.

"There's a marvellous one of Gloria Straight with a stuffed . . . what is it?"

"Oh, the gnu?" Mandrake smiled. "I'm so glad you appreciated our gnu."

"But what made you think of the gnu when you saw Gloria?"

"Oh, but I didn't," Mandrake said. "The moment I saw the dear gnu, I thought of Gloria. It was in the Portobello Road. It's really a portrait of the gnu, you know. Gloria is the property."

The idea interested Carr. "If you think of people as things," he said, "what's Fullbrook like?"

"It's not that way round," Mandrake explained with a slight condescension at the barrister's failure to appreciate the subtlety. "I think of things as people. I wouldn't ever think for example," he threw back his head and glanced at Carr out of the corner of his eyes, "Melville Carr is like a

portable harmonium. But I might see a portable harmonium and say 'Isn't that the spit of Melville Carr?' "

Fullbrook laughed. "*Touché*, Carr!" Then he beckoned the waiter to bring another round.

"Not that I ever have," Mandrake seemed to apologise. "Seen a portable harmonium, I mean—like you!"

"Mr. Melville Carr," came through the public address system. "Wanted on the telephone, please."

Carr was annoyed. His chambers had instructions to hold telephone messages for him, not to ring the club. He got up, but instead of taking the call from the box by the staircase, he went to the Head Porter. "Someone wants me on the 'phone, McIntosh. Find out who it is."

McIntosh came back a minute later.

"It's a Mr. Barrett, sir. Says its very urgent."

"Will you tell him that I'm not in the Club?" McIntosh nodded. "And McIntosh, I shan't be in to Mr. Barrett until further notice. Will you get the switchboard to put all calls for me through to you, before using the public address."

As Carr walked back to the bar, he muttered. "The little bastard. I'll teach him not to try blackmail."

CHAPTER THREE

THE DIFFICULT AGE

As Eddy opened the area door, he heard the knock on the front door. He stood for a moment listening to Mrs. Pascoe's footsteps. The front door opened.

"Good morning, ma'am," a voice said. "D'you have a young man name of Barrett lodging here?"

"He's not home," Mrs. Pascoe said. "He's out to work."

"We're police officers. We've reason to think he's coming back here," the man's voice said. "D'you mind if we wait inside? It's rather cold."

"His room's in the basement," Mrs. Pascoe said, still barring the door. "There's surely some mistake. Never had no trouble in my house. And Barrett's that quiet." Then she relented, feeling the cold wind. "All right. You best come in and wait."

Eddy heard the door close and while they were still in the hall, he ran up the steps and walked rapidly along the road. As he passed the entrance to the mews, he saw the police car parked there. They were out to make a cop, not a friendly call. But what had Jack done? He was fey, of course; but not a roarer. Quiet. Taking no risks. They didn't see much of each other, Jack working day and him nights on the railway. Eddy knew he was fey the first time he met him; would have known it, despite Jack's superficial toughness, even if they hadn't met in the Chequers, which was a well-known fairyland. Barrett was looking for new digs, so Eddy fixed him up at Ma Pascoe's. It was just pity. Jack wasn't his type; took it all so serious, like it was a curse, not just something you had, like red hair and freckles.

There was some chap, Jack never said who. And for a time it went along wonderful. He was in the clouds; not that anything happened, not for love or money. It was pretty damn silly in Eddy's view, but Jack liked it.

Then it bust up—not that there was anything that could be called Anything, to bust up. But Jack looked as if the world had come to an end, like an old St. Bernard whose

keg of brandy had sprung a leak. And he looked so bad; a sort of hopeless look and it wasn't any good saying 'Snap out of it, Jack.' He tried, but it came back like keeping on closing your eyes when you're dead beat.

Eddy didn't want to get involved. Keeping his own head above water was hard enough work without doing any life-saving. And yet Barrett was so damn helpless, so cluttered up with high ideals and hopeless passions.

Eddy Stone went into the lounge of the Chequers and looked round for Barrett. The Chequers had been modernised. They had ripped out the settees and the wealth of cut glass and replaced it with formica and tubular furniture. He looked round, but Barrett wasn't in any of the booths.

The old blind guy was there as usual, with Micky, his foxy faced boy-friend. That pair of weirdies, with their identical thick-striped shirts, gave Eddy goose-pimples. The old geezer couldn't see, but he didn't miss a trick. It was like he had radar beams on the tips of his fingers: asdic ears. "Yes, that's Eddy just come in," he heard Micky say; but asdic-ears knew already

Madge and Henry were at the bar at their usual end, the saucer of salted pea-nuts between them. Madge was a model, smart-Matron type. Twenty years ago she'd been a pretty small-time actress. Henry ran a Men's Hairdressing Saloon a couple of streets away. They got on famously together, living in the good old days of Denham Studios, when Henry dressed the hair of stars like Aubrey Calloway, and Madge took bit-parts as a fan-dancer, a hat-check girl or a streetwalker. They wandered through the galaxies, familiarly talking of Noel and Ralph and Larry and Athene in a way that made Eddy faintly sick, as if the good old days were any better than the new ones.

Eddy caught the eye of Fred the barman. "Seen Jack?"

Fred jerked his thumb. "Gone to phone. Back in a moment."

Eddy went to an empty booth and put the hold-all on the bench beside him. Then he went back to the bar and bought a brown ale. "Going away?" Madge asked.

"Me? No." Then seeing the glance at the hold-all. "Just overnight, that is." God, weren't people nosey?

Barrett came back into the bar, looking round anxiously, then caught sight of him and came over. "Have a drink, chum?" Eddy said.

"You got it?" He saw it on the settle. "No, I won't. All right, I'll have an M. & B. A half."

"Take mine over," Eddy said. He'd seen Jack nervy, but never like this. "I'll bring yours."

Barrett took the glass of brown ale, but he didn't move.

"You don't look too good, Jack," Henry said.

Jack looked at the door of the saloon.

"Doesn't look too good, Madge, does he, Jack doesn't." Henry said. "Not feeling up to par, eh Jack?"

"His old man died," Eddy whispered. Anything to shut the scissors man up. "Cut him up."

"Oh dear!" Madge said. "I am sorry."

"Are you?" Eddy said and took the M. & B. in one hand and with the other steered Jack across to the booth.

"I got the packet, like you said," Eddy whispered. "And they come, just as I was opening the door. Asking for you. Left the car up in the mews."

"They didn't see you?"

Eddy shook his head. "What you done, Jack?" he asked. "Why the scarper?"

Jack sat with his fingers clenched, elbows on the table, his forearms trembling with the strain.

Eddy leant forward. "Don't do that!" he hissed. "You'll have people looking."

People were already looking; Madge and Henry, Fred and Elsa behind the bar; and the weirdies. Micky was telling asdic-ears what his radar couldn't pick up.

"Do what?" Jack asked.

"Stop shaking, you fool."

Jack looked down at his hands as if they were part of someone else. Then he unlocked his fingers and put his hands under the table.

'As if he was putting them in prison' Eddy thought. "Why don't you give yourself up, Jack? Can't be all that bad."

Barrett started to scrape his underlip with the inside of his upper teeth, like a chimp.

"You're not the sort to take it on the lam, Jack. Come on—tell us what you've done."

Barrett looked at the untouched mild and bitter. "It isn't what I've done—though that's bad enough, God knows."

"How bad?"

"Over two thousand!"

"Nicker?"

Jack nodded. Eddy whistled under his breath. "What's worse then?"

The hands came on to the table again and the fingers started fighting. Barrett closed his eyes and bent his head. "I've got to get away, Ed. I've got to."

"You got the dough to."

"No," Barrett looked up. "I haven't; that's the point.

They bled me. I ought to've run away weeks ago. Months ago. Soon as it started."

Eddy leaned forward and whispered. "Blackmail?"

Jack nodded.

"That chap of yours?"

Jack said nothing, but the fingers spoke for him. "More you get, the more they want. The bloody leeches!"

"Why don't you speak to 'im?" Eddy asked. "He's got the dough!"

"I've tried. He'd understand. He'd know what to do. I know he would. But I can't get through to him."

Eddy finished his brown ale. "I want to think," he said. He took his empty glass to the bar. Elsa served him. "Jack looks real cut up about his Dad," she said. "Sudden, wasn't it?"

"When they've both gone," Madge said, "There's nothing between you and death." It was a line she had learnt many years before when she was in repertory in Stafford.

Eddy went back to the booth. Jack was sitting with his head in his hands. "I've got an idea," Eddy said.

"It won't work," Jack said. "This is the end and I'm glad it's come."

"Go to a cinny and let me see Him. Just tell me the name—I'll do it. I'm not on till half-past four this afternoon."

"He's a barrister. You can't just go and see a barrister!"

"So what? He's human. I'll see him."

"You can't see a barrister without a solicitor; not even if you was Lady Docker, you couldn't."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Don't you worry," Jack said. "I've got it figured out

and best I don't tell you. They'd only twist it out of you."

"They wouldn't, yer know."

"They won't get a chance." Jack Barrett picked up the hold-all. "It's all in there? The packet I mean?"

Eddy nodded. Jack seemed to have found some reserve of spirit. "Good luck, Jack." Eddy searched for something to say to fit the situation and from his youth came the figure of the Bishop at his confirmation. "Bless you, cock."

"Thanks."

"Like me to . . . ?" Eddy stood up to go with him.

"I haven't even touched that," Jack said, looking at the mild and bitter. "You do it . . . for me . . . a sort of toast like." He picked up the hold-all in his left hand and shook Eddy's hand with his right. "You been a good friend."

Eddy watched him go out, a brave but frail figure, like a drummer boy advancing on an enemy position. Then he sat down and topped up his glass of brown ale with mild and bitter. Madge stopped by his table.

"So you won't be staying overnight after all," she said. "I never thought Jack Barrett was a thief, whatever else he might be."

"I'll tell you something else you never thought," Eddy said, smiling. "But it's a secret. Just between you and me."

She bent down and inclined her ear to his mouth. Eddy whispered something and she slapped his face, knocking over his glass with her bag at the same time.

The old blind man burst out laughing.

"What was that, P.H.?" Micky asked. "You must tell me."

Fred looked at Elsa. Elsa looked at Fred and passed him a wiping-up cloth. Fred lifted the flap of the bar and went

over to the booth. But already Eddy was half way to the door.

"Poor Madge," Elsa said. "It's the difficult age she's coming to."

"Poor Jack," said Henry. "Wish I knew an age which wasn't."

Elsa ran hot water into the sink. "Wasn't what?" she asked when she had finished.

"Difficult", Henry said and went back to his shop.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECULATION AT A POLICE STATION

Detective Inspector Harris did not suffer fools gladly, so when Detective Sergeant Bridie reported back to the station to say that he had left Detective Constable Adams at Jerome Street, but that so far Barrett had given them the slip, he blew his top.

"For crying out loud," he said, "you couldn't arrest a bus at a request stop. You take the car on to the Mountford site. You don't stop it at the gate. You both go in the foreman's hut. You both go up in the hoist. Tell me, what are you and Adams? Siamese twins?"

"There was no cause to think the man was on the alert, sir."

"Supposing *you* had been drawing wages for eighteen people who didn't exist for months, Bridie, perhaps *you* might not be expecting a visit from the police, but I can

assure you most people would. What about the landlady?"

"She's a Mrs. Pascall, sir," Bridie said. "Scotswoman. A widow. Very surprised she was to hear that Barrett had been up to no good. Barrett's one of the quiet ones; never gives no trouble. Never gets drunk. Doesn't bet on horses. Doesn't go to the dogs. Does the pools, but only a few bob a week. Doesn't fool around with girls . . ."

"Has he *got* a girl, a steady?"

"No. Leastwise, if he has, he never brings her to Jerome Road. Doesn't get many letters, either."

"Friends?"

"Only a young chap in the same house, Eddy Stone. A ticket-office clerk on the Northern Line. Stone brought Barrett to Jerome Road, eight, nine months ago. The room was free and Mrs. Pascall gave it to him. Always regular with his rent, she said."

"Stone and Barrett; were they close?"

"I wanted to see him. But he'd had a telephone call just before we arrived and he'd gone out to meet an Irish friend."

"How d'you know he was Irish?"

"Mrs. Pascall took the call."

"I suppose you didn't think to take the telephone number?" Harris asked with heavy sarcasm.

Bridie read the number from his notebook with quiet pride.

"Get it," the inspector said. "Ask Mrs. Pascall if she's sure it was an Irishman and not Barrett speaking."

As Bridie dialled, the inspector flicked through the papers. He picked up a pencil and underlined "*Next of Kin. John Barrett, Essex Nurseries, Epping. Father.* As Bridie

got through, he picked up the secondary earphone and listened in.

"Hello. What do you want?" a woman asked.

"Mrs. Pascall?"

"Mrs. Pas*coe* speaking."

Inspector Harris struck out 'all' in the notes before him and wrote in 'o'. Calling somebody by the wrong name deliberately is sometimes useful, but to do it by mistake is always foolish.

"No," Mrs. Pascoe was saying. "It might have been someone putting on an Irish voice, but not Jack Barrett."

"Why do you say that?" asked Bridie.

"He's not an imitating sort of man."

Bridie put his hand over the mouthpiece. "Anything else, sir?"

"If Stone's back, I'll have a word with Adams. If not, tell Adams to come straight back to the station."

Stone wasn't back. But he would go on duty soon at Kentish Town. Bridie put down the receiver.

"What about Barrett's room?" asked Harris.

"Very bare, sir. He did a bit of cooking there. It's got a cooker and a sink under the front steps. Looked like he lived out of tins for the most part."

"What about personal things?"

"Very poor, sir." Bridie said. "He didn't spend the money on himself."

Harris drummed his fingers on his desk. "O.K." he said at last and Bridie picked up his ball pen, holding his notebook open.

"You've got a general description?"

"Yes, sir."

"Circulate it on the general alert."

"Airports?"

"I shouldn't think he's got the ready money for that; but there's no harm. See if he's got a passport of his own. Shouldn't think he has, unless he's made more plans than it looks like.

"Get on to the Epping Station. What they know about Mr. John Barrett of the Essex Nuseries; and his son. How they get on. Have them keep an eye on the place in case the boy turns up."

"Should they go and see the father?" Bridie asked.

"Leave it to them. Put them in the picture. The chaps on the spot know best what to do about it."

"Very good, sir. Anything else, sir?"

"Can you think of anything?"

Bridie shook his head. "Only I want to apologise about missing him on the Mountford site, sir. It wasn't Constable Adams's fault."

"Of course it wasn't," Inspector Harris said. "I suppose it was mine. I'm not sorry you didn't arrest him; but I am sorry he gave you the slip. There's a lot more in this than meets the eye."

"Meaning what, sir?"

"I don't know. But if we only knew exactly what he did after you gave him the alarm, we might be able to make some useful guesses. You'd better send Adams to interview Stone as soon as he comes on duty. My bet is that Barrett rang Stone and told him to bring him some things. If Adams acts as if we know all that already, we may get something useful out of him."

Sergeant Bridie went out and Inspector Harris turned to the pile of work waiting on his In tray. But before starting on it, he paused for a moment with his eyes closed

trying to visualise what in the devil's name could drive a young wages clerk without any of the obvious vices to steal a large sum of money; not in one fell swoop but steadily week by week; and yet derive no apparent benefit from it. It looked suspiciously like blackmail. But what, short of murder, could the young man have done which would drive him to take such a risk? And if he had murdered once, what would prevent him trying to murder again?

CHAPTER FIVE

UP IN DOE'S PLACE

He was in luck. As he walked up the conduit to the telephone kiosk, the Indian in a turban vacated it. "Is out of use," he said to Jack.

Barrett went in and pressed Button B. Four pennies rattled out. The Indian had wandered off, his long b ack overcoat whipping in the wind round his tight white trousers. Barrett put the money back in the hiccuping box. After a spasm, the dialling tone came on. He dialled TEM 89543, heard the voice say "Hogg, Hastings & Carr," and pressed Button A.

"Could I speak to Mr. Melville Carr?"

"Who is that speaking?"

"My name's Barrett. I've been trying to get Mr. Carr. It's urgent."

"Hold the line, Mr. Barrett. Mr. Carr is in Court, but he left a message for you."

Suddenly it seemed to him as if the sun had burst through the clouds. He looked across at old Doe's bookshop and all his cares fell away from him; though God alone knew what Mel could do, seeing the fix he was in. He wondered where to suggest they should meet.

"I'm putting you through to Miss Slingsbee."

"Is that Mr. Barrett?" came the voice which had spoken to him earlier.

"That's right. You have a message for me."

"You *are* the Mr. Barrett who phoned before luncheon?"

"That's it. I tried to reach him at the club but he wasn't in."

"This is the message Mr. Carr gave me. I've written it down. It says, 'If Barrett phones, tell him that unless he stops immediately, I shall go to the police. Tell him I mean what I say.' "

"But . . . but . . . there's a mistake, Miss. You don't understand."

"You heard the message," Miss Slingsbee said. There was a click, then silence and then the dialling tone.

Barrett put back the receiver. He felt as if he had been hit in the solar plexus. It was some time before he heard the tapping on the door. A bespectacled African with a pigskin briefcase was waiting in the cold.

Barret picked up his hold-all. He couldn't face Doe for the moment. He walked down the conduit and found a cafeteria. He hadn't eaten since breakfast but he felt no hunger. He bought a cup of tea; and on second thoughts some bar chocolate to put in his hold-all for when he did feel hungry.

The place was almost empty—it was the lull between dinner and tea. But in a corner was a fat woman who had

taken her shoes off. She had a plate of baked beans in front of her, but she was not eating. She was crying. The tears ran down her cheeks in a steady trickle on to her black coat. She did not make any noise or try to wipe the tears away. Just cried, like two taps dripping. She had come to a sort of end, too. It made you feel small, when the bottom's fallen out of your world, to think that the bottom is falling out of the worlds of millions of people all over the world. He waited to see what the woman would do.

After a time she opened her bag and blew her nose on a large handkerchief, swallowed a mouthful of beans, pushed her plate away, fished for her shoes with her toes, eased them on, powdered her nose and then, picking up a large shopping basket, walked out into the street.

"At least she's got a home to go back to," he thought with a stab of self-pity.

He went back to the conduit. The books in the window of Doe's shop made a solid wall, but through the glass of the door, above a coloured county map of Sussex, he could see Miss Benham, with her heavy spectacles and dour face, wandering through the forest of second-hand books. No sign of Harold Doe, though. He might be out buying. In a way, Jack Barrett half hoped he was. After that message from Mel, it would serve him right; except he didn't mean it. It was all a mistake.

The shop-bell rang as he went in. Miss Benham turned, a book in her hand. "Oh!" she said. "It's you, is it?" In those five words there was a wealth of suggestion; but as to what the suggestions were, it was impossible to say, except that none of them were kindly.

"Is Mr. Doe in?" Barrett asked humbly.

"I wonder," Miss Benham speculated in her cultured voice. "Is Mr. Doe in? I suppose I could see."

She turned towards the office at the back and the door opened and there was Mr. Doe, with his thinning, scurfy hair, his short-sighted eyes, his baggy bookseller tweeds. "And so the Prodigal has returned," he said, his cheek twitching. "But we have a fatted calf, Miss Benham, we have a fatted calf?"

"Mr. Doe," Barrett said. "I want to see you. Alone. It's . . . it's urgent."

"This *is* a change," Mr. Doe said. "But a change of what, I wonder. Of mind? Or heart? No, you never had much heart to change, even as a boy. Did you?"

Barrett glanced at Miss Benham. It surprised him that the bookseller could speak like this in front of his assistant. But of course Miss Benham wasn't the usual sort of assistant. Miss Benham looked at him with a faint distaste and then turned away towards the bookshelves.

"Come in. I was never one to harbour malice," Mr. Doe said maliciously. "This is my sanctum. It's an ironical thing, is it not? that when I invited you to come before, you refused; and now I am not so sure that I want to have you in."

As he stood aside to let Barrett pass, Mr. Doe said, "I should have thought you'd be working at this time."

"I got the afternoon off." The lie sounded hollow. "Took it, rather."

"You've always had taking ways," Mr. Doe said. "I shouldn't be surprised if you'd taken quite a lot of other things besides afternoons off."

"What d'you mean?"

"Liberties for example," Mr. Doe said. "With other

people's feelings, for instance." He looked at the reproduction over the fireplace of Henry Tuke's "Boys Bathing". On the shelf below there were some statuettes: of Greek gods or boys. "That is the Egyptian god, Min," he said, pointing to the figure in the centre, who carried his strength in his hand like a candlestick. "There *was* a time—in the Epping days—when I was genuinely fond of you. Very fond. And you called me . . . " He turned to Barrett, the hatred in his eyes magnified by the thick lenses. "What was it you called me?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Doe," Barrett said. "I was a kid. I didn't know. Not a thing. I thought you could grow out of it. It'd be different now."

"You're not *propositioning* me?" Mr. Doe looked surprised.

"I understand . . . such a lot of things. All us Us . . . we're different . . . but we ought to stand together."

There was a tap on the door.

"An admirable sentiment," Mr. Doe said. "Love and let love, as the saying is."

Miss Benham opened the door. "It's Dr. Couldson," she said. "You promised him something rather special."

"Indeed I did," said Mr. Doe. "Very curious and rather rare, as we say in the trade. Well, I'm afraid we'll have to say good-bye, Barrett. Come in again, when you take another afternoon off."

"But I haven't started," Boy said. "This isn't what I came to talk about."

Miss Benham was bringing a very odd looking man from the shop. His spectacles were even thicker than Miss Benham's. He was tall and thin and had a sparse halo of hair rising in white curls from his head.

"I can't go," Barrett said.

"Then go up the stairs," Mr. Doe said. "I'll come up when I've finished." He opened a door into what looked like a cupboard. "You look tired, Jack. Why don't you get into bed?"

The door closed behind him and Barrett went up the narrow staircase to a little back-bedroom. There was a door leading to the front bedroom, but that was locked. Doe had turned the front bedroom into another display room for the shop.

The bedroom in which he found himself was very small, the size of the snuggery below. But it was very odd. It had a double bed which took up most of the room, covered with a rich burgundy-coloured satin padded eiderdown-counterpane. And on the ceiling there was what looked like yellow curtains operated by tasselled cords, hanging over the bed in pairs.

He pulled one pair and nothing happened. He pulled the other and the curtain drew back revealing a mirror above the bed.

Lying on the bed and looking into the ceiling mirror he could see curtains on the wall at the end of the bed. They concealed a further mirror.

He could hear from below the talk of Mr. Doe and Dr. Coulsdon. "I don't mind if the translator's a bit squeamish." Dr. Coulsdon. "I haven't too much time and it picks out the interesting parts."

The bedroom was a concealed hall of mirrors. Anyone in the bed could by a process of reflections see half a dozen reproductions of himself.

Boy went to the window and looked out at the soot black wall five yards away. He was caught up here, exactly the

way that Harold Doe had wanted him to be caught the moment he talked of Us being different but having to stand together. He had meant it to be an appeal for him and all the others like him. But Doe had taken it as a surrender.

If there had been a chance that it would buy silence, God knows what he might have done. But Doe had passed beyond that, into a world of mirrors. He was quite different, frighteningly different from the chap in the bookshop in the little Essex town who had made shy advances seven years before, offering him adoption, love and partnership. Then he was fey and queer, now he was corrupt and vicious.

"Sod Mel!" he muttered. He had spent these months trying to cover for him; and then to have that message from Miss Slingsbee. "Sod Mel!"

He went down the little winding stairs. He was going to say something to that dirty old doctor that would shake him. "Picking out the interesting parts!"

But Coulsdon had gone and Doe was returning eagerly to his sanctum. He was surprised to meet Barrett on the landing. "So we've changed our mind again."

Boy Jack felt like a little boy again, so brimming with passion and so impotent. "Don't you try it on Carr," he said. "He'll smash you, and serve you bloody well right."

"You're still very young," Mr. Doe said. "And I like you for it. I really do. You remind me of my youth."

Barrett spat on the floor.

Mr. Doe was not annoyed. "The grubby gesture of an idealist. I understand it so well."

Barrett said something brief but obscene.

"Good luck to you, Jack," Mr. Doe said. "Once I

thought I was going to write a great book. Now I'm selling them. I just wonder what will happen to *you*."

"Just so long as I don't end up like you, I don't care." Barrett struck at a shelf of books and sent them tumbling on the floor. Then he went out and slammed the door behind him.

"Oh dear!" said Mr. Doe, gathering the books tenderly. "I'm so glad that Miss Benham has gone to the post." He took the books to his desk and dusted them and saw that they had come to no harm, then put them back in their shelves as carefully as a mother would pick up a child who had fallen.

There was still one thing pure, or almost pure, in Mr. Doe's life. He loved books; not what was printed inside them, but the bindings and the print and the feel of India paper and the golden edges.

"I'm afraid," he said to himself, as he replaced the last of his casualties, "Jack Barrett has had it."

CHAPTER SIX

TWO OF NATURE'S VICTIMS

Jack Barrett made for Leicester Square Station. The wind had risen. It was like a knife. It was too cold for snow. His duffle coat felt like a summer vest.

The first rush hour was starting, figures nipping off from the office before time to beat the rush. 'Let 'em work it out between 'em,' he thought. 'Let Mel work it out. It's about time.'

He bought an *Evening Standard*. Three masked men had killed a wages clerk in Deptford, a wages clerk like him, but they'd got away with £18,000. A ten-year-old Brownie had been raped and murdered in Potters Bar. A share-pusher had been sentenced to ten years for swindling people out of £130,000. In smaller print a woman had received three months for shoplifting goods to the value of £4.9.7½d. from a multiple store. A bricklayer in Giggleswick had won £160,000 on the pools. A TV personality, whose commercials for bowel-opening medicines were nationally famous, had run over a pack of fox-hounds and had his licence suspended for six months. There was no hue and cry for Barrett. But it was only a matter of time. He realised that since the moment he was born, or at any rate since the moment as early as he could remember that he knew that he couldn't cope, this was the end ordained.

At Green Park Station he got out; and he had an inspiration. People were too busy to use the telephone. He called Hogg, Hastings & Carr. "This is Harold Doe, Bookseller, speaking," he said. "Is Mr. Carr in?"

"Mr. Carr is not in. Would you like to speak to his secretary?"

"No, thank you." It was not an inspiration. He made his way along to Cavendish Cars. Phip worked there, Phip who, in the Chequers, had said over and over again, "Any time you want a run, let me know, old boy. I can always get a car." It was one of Phip's ways of not standing his round of drinks. "Well, I must be pushing off, but if you want a run, don't forget." Now Barrett was going to take him up on it.

As he came into the blazing light of the showroom, Barrett became conscious of his muddy shoes and trouser-

cuffs, the shabby duffle-coat. Behind a desk at the back sat a young man, a real slicker; and Phip, like the young man's older and less successful brother, stood leaning against a grey Jaguar tapping out the time till closing with the bowl of his pipe against the palm of his hand.

Barrett stood in the light of the window, willing with all his might that Phip should turn towards him. It was a faculty that he had found he possessed, if he concentrated hard enough.

Phip stopped tapping and looked at Barrett. Barrett beckoned with a backward jerk of his head. Phip took an uneasy glance at the desk-slicker, then pointed to the back of the shop and began to move in that direction.

Barrett went quickly round to the garage entrance and waited in the shadow outside the sliding door. Phip came out with that sort of shabby thoroughbred air of his, which always made Barrett shy. Phip didn't work for his living like other chaps. He was just filling in time, he was careful to explain, until one of his rich relatives died and left him enough to occupy the position in life which was rightfully his by birth. His suits were from Savile Row, but threadbare.

"I didn't want to barge into the showroom, Phip."

"I wouldn't have minded, old boy," Phip said. "But the powers-that-be might. Unless you wanted to buy a Jag."

"You know what you said about if I wanted a run, Phip?"

"Of course."

"Well, I do."

"What?"

"Want a run."

Phip's expression was like that of someone who has

said 'Drop in some time' seeing a caller on his doorstep. "I wonder when I could fix it."

"It must be now," Barrett said.

"But we aren't closed."

"When you do, I mean. This evening. I've got to get away. It's urgent."

"Sorry. No can do," Phip said. "I've got to deliver a crate out at Putney after we close. If it had been any other night." The lies came smooth off his tongue; but when he saw the look on Boy's face, the hopeless despair, he softened it with a question. "Where do you want to go?"

"Kelworth. New town." He was going to say, "I've got a friend there," but it was too risky.

Phip took out his wallet and looked inside it. There were three pound notes. He took two out, looked at them, put one back and held out the other, a concession to conscience rather than a gift.

Barrett shook his head. "It was the lift I wanted."

"I see." The reason for the urgency dawned on the car salesman. "If I wanted privacy I'd take a rush-hour bus or train. Then hitch a lift. I wouldn't go to the terminus though. Better to get out the station before."

Barrett said nothing.

"You'll be all right, Jack."

Barrett turned away without a word.

Phip stood looking after him, the thin vulnerable figure slanting in the wind. 'One of Nature's victims,' he thought, as he turned and walked back to the sale room. Against a pillar was a full-length mirror in which he caught a glimpse of his own reflection, the natural distinction of his face overlaid with the dust of dissipation. 'And you,' he thought, 'are another.'

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE ETHICS OF BLACKMAIL

Mr. Melville Carr was the owner of a Regency house overlooking the river in Chiswick Mall, a house the sight of which always gladdened his heart. Apart from the grace and beauty of its rooms and its position, it was the symbol of his achievement, the distinction he had won in his profession and the happiness he had found rather later in life than most men in his marriage with Scott Hankin's younger sister, Laura.

Previous to marriage, he had lived in chambers in the Middle Temple. The acquisition of the Chiswick Mall house, its renovation and re-equipment had been a combined act, the planning and execution of which had brought Laura and himself closer together in those early days of marriage which are most difficult for men whose habits have become set in years of comfortable and selfish bachelordom. In making the house a place of quiet beauty, they had done something towards making the same of their married life.

The only disappointment had been the failure so far to produce the children for whom the day and night nurseries were already waiting. Though Laura had not discussed the subject, Melville knew that the interest which she had begun to take in the Children's Clinic was a compensation for the lack of children of her own.

So when as on this evening he came back to find that his wife was not yet back from the Clinic, he felt that the jolt to his comfort was to a certain extent a criticism.

"But Mr. Hankin's here," said Mrs. Brooks, the housekeeper.

"Oh, good!" Melville had been at school with Scott Hankin, with whom in a common schoolboy fashion he had been sentimentally in love. Scott was a couple of years younger than himself. In those school days, he had been a fair-haired, blue-eyed, strawberries-and-cream complexioned, a della Robbia cherub of extraordinary charm, a great natural purity of body and spirit, but as he grew older he developed a natural wit, which was as fresh as his complexion.

It was a thought which Carr had scarcely admitted to himself—and would never have admitted to Laura—that one of the reasons why he was so attracted to her was because she was so much more like Scott when he was young than Scott himself was now.

"I've cadged myself a drink," Scott said, as Melville went into the river room. "I feel so damn lonely with Ronnie away at school." Scott had married Melville's sister fourteen years before and she had died of a cancer eighteen months ago. (Melville had sometimes wondered whether Scott had felt towards his sister Harriet as he felt towards Laura. But that again was a subject he could never discuss.)

"You need a wife," he said. "And Ronnie needs a mother." He poured himself a well-deserved whisky, put in a cube of ice and a dash of water.

"You haven't another sister," Scott said. "And if you did, she might take after you."

"I take that hard," Melville said, "considering what an angel of light I am."

"I wouldn't say that," Scott said, "but you'll make a good Q.C. and then a first-class judge."

Melville turned away. Though it would mean a drop in income, it would mean the crowning of his ambition. For twenty-five years he had dreamed and planned and worked to become Mr. Justice Carr, whose name would go down in the books of Common Law as the source of wise and subtle judgments. But he didn't know that Scott had realised this. "You're outlining your own career," Carr said. "You've got far better qualifications than I have."

Scott came over and put his arm round Melville's shoulders. "Dear old Mel," he said. "Give me another drink."

Melville disentangled himself roughly. "You know what you want. You pour it yourself."

He went over to the river window and pulled them aside a bit and looked through at the lights reflected on the water. "I don't care about taking silk or sitting on the bench, Scott," he said. "Of course it's a great honour. But this life I've got is just what I want. It's wonderful. And I won't be rude. Laura's very like you, Scott. But not so narky." He paused. "She's good for my humility. She'll end up a Dame of the British Empire—on the Brains Trust, or What's my Line."

"Who will?"

Melville turned round and saw Laura. "Oh, sweetest pie," he said, "so you've put the morons to bed for the night." He went over and kissed her, clinging to her with a sudden passion as he remembered the threat of the day.

"Darling!" Laura said, at the same time pleased and embarrassed. "Not in front of brothers."

"Only one brother. And he's feeling very sad and hungry, and if you asked him to dinner . . . "

"Stay to dinner, Scott. I thought you'd already invited yourself. I'd better tell Mrs. Brooke."

Laura went out and the two men watched her go; Scott with all the easy feelings of a brother who wishes for his beloved sister a happiness beyond this life, and Melville with a husband's everyday anxieties.

"I don't think that Clinic's a very good idea," Scott said.

"Nor do I," Melville answered. "But it'll do until we have our own nursery."

Over dinner, Scott talked about a brief he had been given which had never come to the court. "It was a blackmail case. Some poor chap in Ruislip. A company director he called himself. A dealer in human hair. We wanted him to prosecute. But he got cold feet."

Laura and Melville burst out laughing. "Why *cold* feet?"

"Because . . . " Then Scott realised how over-serious he was being, and burst out laughing. "But the mere threat of blackmail proceedings stopped the whole business. This human-hair merchant refused to prosecute and the nuisance was stopped as far as he was concerned."

"But it'll go on with someone else?" Laura asked.

"Of course," Scott said. "That's the second defence of blackmail. They bleed you white. You threaten a legal action which will ruin you as well as them. They stop. You drop the case with relief. Then they start on some other wretched victim."

"They call blackmail the cowardliest of crimes," Laura

said. "But isn't the person who won't prosecute the biggest coward of them all?"

"Is he?" Scott asked. "I know he goes into the box as Mr. X. But his identity must get around to his family and his friends—the people he really wants to hide it from."

"He shouldn't care," Laura said indignantly. "If his friends and family don't stand by him—well they aren't worth his knowing them."

"What do you think, Mel?" Scott asked.

Melville Carr twirled the stem of his wine glass. "I don't know," he said. "To be ruined for a matter of principle."

"Not a matter of principle!" Laura broke in. "To bring the blackmailer to justice so that other people will not suffer . . . that shows a courage which atones for whatever the guilty secret."

"Perhaps," her husband said. "But the sort of person who is liable to be blackmailed is usually a moral coward in the first place."

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOMETHING NEW IN KELWORTH

Barrett got a lift at Croydon from a chap in an old Rover. He was a free-lance writer, who worked for the B.B.C., called Adrian Veasey-Williams. "You may know my name," he said.

Barrett said, yes, he did. But he couldn't quite place it. Adrian Veasey-Williams spent half an hour telling him in a quiet way, how famous he was and then he said he always gave people lifts, because he was interested in other

people's lives. They gave him ideas. And it was Barrett's turn to do the talking. Or he thought it would be. But, luckily, as soon as Mr. Veasey-Williams learnt that Barrett was a warehouseman's clerk going to see his old aunt Mollie, because she had written to say she was feeling queer, Mr. Veasey-Williams started telling him about the different people he had given lifts. Barrett closed his eyes in the darkness and let him talk on. When he realised the stories were meant to be funny, he listened for the gaps where he was supposed to laugh and laughed.

"Thanks a lot for the lift," he said when they reached the Ford depot on the Kelworth by-pass.

"It's a pleasure," Mr. Veasey-Williams said, "I've enjoyed your company."

Barrett did not try to telephone Frank Young from the Ford depot. It was too risky. He walked on the dark side of the road into the New Town, looking for a call-box. But the planners of the city of the future had been so concerned with laying on telephones in every dwelling place that they did not consider it necessary to build any for the use of people like embezzlers on the run from the police.

Barrett was right in the centre before he saw a box and the same instant he saw Frank himself and Sylvie coming out of the cinema, showing *I was a teen-age werewolf* and *I married a monster from outer space* in a double bill. He called out "Frank! Frank!" Frank Young turned and the moment he saw Barrett he beamed with surprise and pleasure. "Why, hallo, Jack! What are you doing here?"

A moment later Sylvie turned. She was annoyed, and though Frank came and wrung him by the hand, she stayed where she was, looking at his dirty shoes, his clothes and with especial disapproval at his hold-all.

"What are you doing here, Jack?" Frank repeated, "Something wrong?"

"I want to see you," Barrett said. "I'm in a fix."

Sylvie had moved into the arcade of Cumfy Homes Ltd. She was standing framed against a Contemporary Lounge-bed-breakfast-room in which everything served a multiple purpose according to the Alpha-Omega plan. She fitted in perfectly. "Yes, come out of the drizzle," Frank said, trying to excuse her obvious refusal to be seen by her neighbours in the company of this young tramp. She stood looking at the TV cocktail cabinet with commode beneath and early morning tea overlay available on easy deposit and weekly payments of 8/– a week which spread over three years.

THE BEST IN QUALITY
THE CHEAPEST IN PRICE

But she was listening to every word passing between her Frank and his queenie school-friend.

"What's the big idea?" Frank said.

"I've got to get to the coast," Barrett said.

"What's stopping you?" Sylvie snapped.

Frank turned to his wife. "Look, Sylvie. If I say Jack can have a shake-down for the night, he can have it, see?"

Sylvie had always seemed to Barrett to have a sort of brittle prettiness. He could, by an effort of imagination, see what attracted Frank to her. But now there emerged from the shell of the young and pretty woman the mean hag she would become with age. "No, Frank. I told you the last time he came, never again. I won't have 'im in my house."

"It's *my* house," Frank said. "And I say who stays and who doesn't."

Barrett felt dead tired and there was nothing more his

body wanted than a good night's rest. But he had caused enough trouble. "Don't quarrel over me, please."

Frank took no notice of him. "He's staying, you hear?"

"Let go of my wrist," his wife said. "If you want to spend the night with him, you can do it some other place, not in my home."

"You . . . " Frank did not finish. Sylvie wrenched her fist away and ran off into the street. Frank looked after her, half wanting to follow but held by his friend's greater need and the certainty that he'd find her at home when he got back. "I'm sorry, Jack," he said. He grinned. "We've all got blind spots. Anyway, it'll be easier without her. Could you do with some fish and chips?"

Barrett nodded. He had forgotten how hungry he was. He had eaten almost nothing since breakfast. (Had the fat woman who had wept over her baked beans had any supper? he wondered. What was she doing now?)

Frank took his arm and led him a hundred yards into the old part of Kelworth, the speck of grit on which this pearl of a new town had formed. The windows were misted up and as they opened the door a crowd of hot fishy air jostled past them. The fryers were going full sizzle, but the main queue was for take-away orders. The tables were almost empty.

They looked up at the slate board, on which was chalked:

FRYING TONIGHT

SKATE	..	1/6		
HUSS	..	1/3		
COD	..	1/3	Lge.	1/6
PLAICE	..	1/9	1/6	1/3

Frank ordered two large cod and six pennyworth of

chips apiece. He did not want all this himself, but he knew that Jack Barrett would refuse to take more than he did. They went to the table furthest from the counter and after they had taken the edge off their hunger, Frank said. "You'd better tell me the whole story, Jack."

Frank himself was perfectly normal, but he had had a brother, two years younger than himself, about Jack's age, who had got into trouble at school and killed himself. It had given Frank a sympathy for Barrett which he might not otherwise have had. He hadn't felt that sympathy for his own brother and he still wondered in the dark hours before dawn whether he was in some way responsible for his brother's death. Jack Barrett was the person to whom he could make amends.

It took a long time to tell the story. In fact the fish and chip shop closed down before they were half way through and they wandered through the deserted streets of the New Town, with only the comfort of the showrooms for an hour before the full story was told.

To Frank, it was almost incredible that this boy should have taken on a responsibility which he should have put immediately on a man much older, wealthier and more capable of shouldering it. Barrett was the victim, not of the blackmailers, but of his own love and loyalty. He was like someone who, to help a friend, had taken one step into a quicksand and was being inexorably sucked under. "But it isn't too late," Frank said. "Damn Sylvie, I'll put you up. I'll go to the police tomorrow. I'll get on to this chap and make him see me and explain what's happened. 'Course you've done wrong, but they'll take it into consideration if you turn King's Evidence or Queen's Evidence, or whatever it is."

"I can't, Frank. It'll ruin Him, whatever happens. The only thing is to get away."

"And how will you get away?"

"Can you lend me twenty quid, Frank? Portsmouth or Southampton, I could buy a job as a steward for that. I know I could."

For Frank, with his carefully prepared budget, the telly and the Hoovermatic on the never-never, the mortgage and payments on the car, twenty pounds cash was a great deal of money. Sylvie and he discussed every item of their domestic expenditure. Theirs was a planned domestic economy and though they had not enough money yet to afford to propagate themselves, they had already worked out the cost of a family.

It was all very admirable, but there was in Frank a streak of irresponsibility. Running a family like a business appealed to one side of his nature; it was orderly and rational and decent. But there was another side which found it inhuman, unromantic and as odious as the new town in which he lived. So when, some four years before, his aunt Doris had died leaving him seventy-four pounds, he had kept this windfall secret from Sylvie.

"I won't lend you twenty quid," he said. "But I'll give you it. I'll draw it tomorrow and send it Poste Restante. Where? Southampton?"

"That's better than Portsmouth," Jack said. "Thanks a lot."

Sylvie would allow him to give Jack a quid as the price of not bringing him home. "Take this for now," he said. "Don't say 'thank you'. You'd do the same for someone else in a jam."

"I didn't mean to thank you for that, Frank; not the money. But . . . understanding. You not being like me."

When he got back to 172, The Ridgeway, Sylvie was sitting on the contemporary bed brushing her hair. She looked at Frank with a coy-penitent sensual air, which her husband ignored directly, while appreciating it from three different angles in her dressing table mirrors.

He took the change out of his pockets and inserted two threepenny bits in the lucky money pig (payment for the telly) removed his waterproof 18-jewel self-winding watch and placed it so that its luminous hands were visible from the bed and took off his tie.

"You haven't forgiven me, have you, Frank?" she asked, looking up at him little-girlishly from under the hair fallen over her face. As she leaned forwards, her breasts showed swelling above her nylon nightdress.

"I don't expect you to understand a thing like that," he said coldly.

"But *you* do?" She stopped brushing her hair.

He undid his trouser-belt and let the trousers fall.

As he lifted them and hung them over the bar of the dumb-valet he said, "Yes, I *do*."

"Perhaps," taunted Sylvie, stopping brushing her hair for a moment, "perhaps that's because you are *one* of them."

The next moment the hair-brush was struck out of her hand and scuttered across the floor. A demonic energy, the existence of which she had never suspected, came on and into her, beating up savagely with more hatred than love. And that was the entry of the Young family into the sphere of the unplanned family economy.

Sylvie loved it.

CHAPTER NINE

A QUEER CALL

Scott returned home soon after dinner and Melville went to his study to work on the next day's brief. There was nothing worth watching on TV and Laura had a bath, took a sleeping pill and got into bed. She had a novel called *The Foxglove Saga* by Evelyn Waugh's boy, Auberon. It was brilliant, though rather horrible and she read it until her pill started to take effect. Then she turned out the light and went to sleep.

She had already said her prayers but, as she drowsed off, she murmured to herself a vague travesty of a prayer from Evensong.

She was already asleep when the telephone by the bed began to ring. Melville always switched it upstairs before taking the dog for a walk. There is the possibility in a barrister's, as in a doctor's life, that a night call may be urgent. In Nairobi, Delhi and Canberra the sense of time in London can go astray. But a call unanswered may mean the loss of hundreds of pounds.

Laura struggled out of her sleep and picked up the telephone. "Melville Carr's house, yes. From Kelworth? Who is it? Barrett? All right. Wait a moment." She switched on the light, got the pad and pencil ready. "I'll take the call."

"Is that Mr. Carr?" a slightly 'off' voice asked.

"Mr. Carr is out. This is Mrs. Carr. Can I take a message?"

"Oh, Mrs. Carr!" The urgency of the voice crackled over the wire, "I've been trying to get him all day. And it's urgent. It's terribly urgent. For him, I mean. I don't care about me. I'm through. I've come to the end."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Barrett," Laura said. "I find this all rather confusing. You're calling from a public telephone? What do you want my husband to do? I don't understand."

"He's got it all wrong," the voice said. "I've been trying to protect him, but I don't think he believes me. I want to explain."

"I find it *very* puzzling, the more you explain," Laura said. "What do you want me to *do*?"

"I must *speak* to him," the voice went on, "tell him not to block me. Is he there in the room?"

"He is *not* in the room," Laura said. "My husband is not the sort of person who hides behind other people."

"I know, Mrs. Carr," the voice said. "I think he's the most wonderful man I've ever met. As *you* know. But it's urgent. *He's* in danger. It doesn't matter about me. Just tell him that, will you?"

Laura put down the receiver. She knew that sort of voice. Though she had never met Barrett, she had heard dozens like him. She felt sick.

The front door slammed. Melville called Queenie, the bull terrier bitch, to go to her basket in the kitchen. The sleeping draught had lost its potency. Laura was wide awake, but she switched off the light. Melville had said that he was going to work late on his brief. She felt that she could not talk to him until she had had time to think. He usually looked from the street to see if her light was off, when he brought the dog back. If it was on, he came up to say goodnight.

She heard him climbing the stairs now. On a second impulse she switched the light on again.

He opened the door and because he was a sensitive person, he knew immediately something was wrong. "What's happened?"

She did not answer. His face was like one of those optical illusions which spectacle shops place in the windows. Look at it this way and it was the face of the well-known barrister, Melville Carr, married to Laura (nee Hankin). Look at it that way and it was the face of a homo, trying to cure himself (or just cover himself?) by marriage. Which was he? "I've had a telephone call," she said.

"Telephone call? At this time of night?" He was genuinely puzzled. "Was it New York?"

"No," she said. "Have another guess."

"I don't get it." He was still puzzled. "Who called?"

"What do you make," she asked, "of the name 'Barrett'?"

The penny dropped. He blushed. His fists clenched. Then he suddenly turned very white. "My God! He didn't. He didn't dare. Where did the little sod call from?"

"From Kelworth. He reversed the charges. It was a public call-box."

Melville went to the telephone and lifted the receiver.

"What are you going to do?"

"Call the operator and trace the number," he replied, dialling rapidly.

But Laura switched off the extension. "Don't you want to know what he said first?" she asked.

"You can tell me that later."

"He said it didn't matter about him," she said. "But *you* were in danger." She kept her fingers on the extension.

"He's trying to blackmail me," Melville said. "It's quite

innocent. I'll explain later. Let go of that, my dear. I've got to get that number."

She let go and he switched on the extension and dialled again.

"It's worse than that, Melville," Laura said. "He thinks you're the most wonderful man he's ever met."

"He what?"

" 'The most wonderful man I've ever met,' he said. 'But it's urgent. He's in danger.' "

Melville put back the receiver. "What the hell does he mean by that?"

"If you told me a bit more about this Barrett, I might be able to answer that. He isn't trying to blackmail you. It's worse, I think!"

"Worse?"

"He's in love with you."

"You're crazy!"

"Are you in love with him?" Laura said, "Because if you are, get on to that telephone and find the Kelworth number and speak to him. But don't expect ever to see me again."

Melville sat on the bed and looked at the telephone and kept his hands pressed tight between his knees. "Laura," he said, looking at the floor, "when I married you—I was quite honest, wasn't I? I love you so very much, I couldn't bear to hurt you by deceit. Even though it hurt you for me to tell you. And me, as much; or even more, because it was my . . . my curse."

She saw the agony written across his face and put out her hand and held his fist, clenched on the eiderdown. "And I told you, darling, my one condition," she said. "I knew it might not work."

"I have *been* honest," he said. "I swear it. I've done nothing in that way at all."

"*Done* nothing! You've made this boy fall madly in love with you. And maybe you're madly in love with him. What do I care what you've *done*? What have you *felt*? That's what matters."

"No," he said. "No!"

"And yet this nothing which you say you've done or felt has placed you in danger? It doesn't make sense, darling. And what's this . . . this creature doing in Kelworth?"

"I don't know."

He looked so wretched and beaten. "You must!"

"I don't, I tell you. The moment there seemed to be anything . . . well, you know anything serious . . . I just said 'No. No. This has got to stop!' "

"But if it hadn't been *serious* . . . a sort of jolly . . . well, I wouldn't know what your equivalent of a slap and tickle was . . . "

Melville stood up. He was shocked. Men are always far more shocked by the vulgarities of women than women are by the vulgarities of men. It is one of the few monopolies which men consider should be theirs after the emancipation of women. He lit a cigarette and walked over to the window looking across the river. There were no lights reflected in the water. It was very late, too late now to phone the Kelworth number.

"You didn't tell me about this *grande affaire*!" Laura said.

"I'll tell you now," said Melville, inhaling the smoke from his cigarette deeply. "I was coming back from chambers one night. It was pouring with rain. There was this lad without a macintosh, getting drenched through. I saw him, beckoned and he jumped in beside me."

"A pick-up!"

"No. A lift. Just like you and I have given dozens of people."

"But he was different!"

"He was. Though I didn't realise it, completely, that first time. I just thought he was rather a nice boy, a wages clerk. Very simple. Attractive manners; and a queer sort of idealism in him."

"So you did realise he was queer from the start?"

"Not in that sense. Odd, strange; out of the ordinary; like you."

"I can't bear that," Laura said. "So you picked him up because he was like me. It's very flattering!"

"I picked him up," Melville repeated, "because he was wet through."

"What did you do after you picked him up?" Laura asked.

He turned on her impatiently. "Look, you'll have to take my word for it that the whole thing was perfectly innocuous . . ."

"In that case," asked his wife, "why should you suspect Barrett of trying to blackmail you?"

CHAPTER TEN

A CASE FOR KID GLOVES

Barrett left the telephone box and walked across the clinker pull-in towards the long bungalow, illuminated by the neon script *JACK'S SNACKS*. He did not see the man sitting

on a motor-cycle, who had been watching him from the shelter of two Scammell long loaders.

The man waited until Barrett had gone inside the café. Then he dismounted, propped the bicycle on its stand and walked across to the telephone box. He took off his heavy driving gloves, laid them on the directory shelf and dialled. As he waited for the answer, he stood in a position so that he could see the door of the transport café.

Jack was a little man with a white wedge-shaped face. "Egg on chips, sausage on chips, beefburger on chips," he said.

Barrett looked over to the drivers of the two lorries, who were sitting at the same table. They had nearly finished.

"Just tea," he said. His hunger had disappeared.

"And a wad?" Jack asked.

"Just tea; and ten Woods."

The Scammell drivers were sitting back, having cleaned up their plates. Barrett took his mug over to the table next to theirs. " 'd evening." He nodded to them as he passed.

They nodded back. " 'd evening." They knew what he wanted.

"Going to the coast?" Barrett asked.

One of them lighted a cigarette. "London," he said.

"Pity," Barrett answered. He held the warm cup in his hands. The heat of the café after the cold outside made him realise how tired he was. He wondered if Jack had a spare bed and would give him a doss-down for the night.

The other lorry driver, who had his back to Barrett, leaned back in his chair. At first Barrett didn't understand what he was up to, then he edged close to the man.

"Shouldn't try to cadge a lift, chum," the driver said quietly. "Not tonight. Not here, leastwise."

"What d'you mean?"

"Word to the wise," the driver said quietly.

The other stood up and took his padded leather driving jacket off a hook by the door. "Time we pushed, Charley," He put it on and called to Jack. "See you Thursday, Jack. Sorry about Maud, tell her."

"Maud'll be all right," Jack said. "She'll be right as rain by Thursday."

As the two men went out, Barrett wiped the misted window to watch them go. He stiffened, as he saw a car swing off the road, the blue light above the windscreen. He bent down, grabbed his hold-all and made for the Gents.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw Jack open the flap of the counter to collect the dirty plates from the drivers' table. He shut the door of the Gents behind him. It had no inside bolt; just a roller-towel on the door, a wash-basin and a stand-up in the corner. But there was a sit-down with a door. He put a penny in, turned the handle and, once inside, slid the engaged bolt.

It was tiny. He had to balance the hold-all on the stool. As he zipped it open, he heard voices in the café. Jack was saying, "He's in the lav." And another voice, "Is there a window? Beardmore, guard the window."

The packet was on the top and he ripped the wrapping off. The hold-all slipped in the pan and he shoved it on the floor and then started to tear the scrap book feverishly and feed the bits into the pan.

The door of the Gents opened and one of them said, "Come on out, Barrett."

He tore the last couple of sheets and pulled the plug.

It wouldn't flush. He pulled again and he heard the voice shout, "Break that door down! He's getting rid of something!" And suddenly the water poured in a torrent into the pan and the door splintered and hit him in the back and he pitched forward. His head hit the wall and he saw stars. Then someone was on top of him and before he could collect himself, his arms were pinned behind his back and he was hauled out of the closet and the sergeant went in and looked into the pan. Blood started to drip from his eyebrow on to his cheek and he felt it briny in his mouth.

"What did you stuff down there?" the sergeant asked.

Barrett said nothing.

"You might as well tell us, because we can easily find out," said the sergeant.

"If you can," Barrett said, "why ask me?"

The knee of the policeman pinning his arms came up against the bottom of his spine. Barrett winced.

"Where's the man-hole?" the Sergeant asked Jack, taking out his torch.

"I'll show you," Jack said.

As the Sergeant went out, he said to the constable. "Charge him and take him away."

"Are you James Edward Barrett?" asked the constable, straining his arms back until his shoulders hurt.

"Yes."

"I charge you with the embezzlement of £2,301.5.6d. from the wages of Messrs. Comfort & King. Anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence."

Through the open door of the Gents, Barrett saw a woman in a pink dressing gown with worn pink mules on

her feet. Her hair was in curlers and she looked as if she had just woken up. "What's goin' on here?" she asked. "Where's Jack?"

"It's all right, ma'am," said the constable. "Sorry if we disturbed you." He turned to Barrett and noticing the blood on his face for the first time, wiped it off with his handkerchief. "Coming quietly?"

Barrett nodded.

Barrett went so quietly that on the way to London, he fell asleep in the van. It was all over at last and it was a relief. No more fear of discovery, no more running away. Just the constable sitting opposite him, watching him, like a nurse in a hospital beside a dying man.

At the station, they gave him a mug of hot tea and a boiled egg and bread and butter and let him have a smoke. The cell was bare, but it was warm and he felt better for the food and a sergeant, not the one at the café, but another one, called Bridie, came and sat with him.

Barrett was suspicious of the sergeant, because he must be out to pump him. But all he seemed out for was Barrett himself. Then he put a dressing on his forehead and he said when the doctor came on duty he would get him to have a look at it. "Got anyone who might be worrying about you, son?" he asked.

Barrett shook his head.

"No dad or mum?"

"Don't drag them into this," Barrett said.

"Well, you've dragged them into it, really, haven't you?" Sergeant Bridie said. "They'd want to help you, whatever you've done."

"You don't know them," Barrett answered.

"You want someone to take care of things for you outside. Got a girl?"

Barrett shook his head.

"What about Eddy? Would you like him round?"

"Look," Barrett said. "I've told you I did it. Isn't that enough?"

"The inspector might want to know a little more," Bridie said.

"What have you done with the money?" Inspector Harris asked.

"I spent it."

"On what?"

"Things."

"What things?"

"All sort of things."

"Do you really expect me to believe that?" asked the inspector. "You haven't bought any clothes during the last six months; you've lived a very quiet life, the odd drink or the cinema. There are only two possibilities. The first is that you've got it in a post office savings bank. And I don't believe that because you'd have had the book on you when you tried to get away. The second is that you've given it to somebody else."

"Who to?"

"A blackmailer." The inspector took a cigarette and passed one over to Barrett. He flicked his lighter and passed it over. "Look, son," he said, "I've been in the force since before you were born. I've seen all sorts sitting in that chair where you are now. I know a real embezzler, when I see one; the chap with sticky fingers. You aren't one of

those. The only thing which would induce you to rob Peter is if you have to pay Paul."

Barrett sat stolid.

"Stealing is a very serious offence, mind you," the inspector went on. "And two thousand pounds is a lot of money—far too much for you to blue without anyone noticing. You'll get a heavy sentence for that. But I can assure you that blackmail is something which we take far more seriously than embezzlement—and if you tell us who's been squeezing you, I give you my word I'll get you the most lenient sentence I can. What d'you say to that?"

Inspector Harris leaned back in his chair, watching the play of emotion across the young man's face. Then the expression hardened into sullen obstinacy. "I spent it," he said, "I spent it. That's my story and I'm sticking to it."

Harris looked across at Bridie, who had been taking the record on a tape. "All right, sergeant. Let's see what a little solitary confinement will do."

Sergeant Bridie went to the door and called a constable. Barrett stood up. "I suppose you haven't got a lawyer," Harris said.

Barrett shook his head.

"You're entitled to legal aid," said the inspector. "Choose the man you want. But I warn you, Barrett: for God's sake, tell him the real story and take his advice. I mean it for your own good, son. I really do."

The two detectives watched the young man go out. Then the inspector sighed, and shook his head. "What d'you make of it, Bridie?"

"I think he's being very sensible," Bridie answered, "the law being what it is."

"I meant every word I said about trying to get the embezzlement sentence lightened," the inspector said.

Sergeant Bridie nodded. "But what about the crime for which he's being blackmailed?"

Harris thought a moment. "You mean he's one of them?"

"What else? He doesn't show it much; but Eddy does. And they met at the Chequers."

"It adds up," he agreed. "And it makes a pretty nasty total."

"I don't get that, sir."

"Well, if the Homosexual Practices recommendations of the Wolfenden report had been accepted, Barrett couldn't have been blackmailed in the first place and his employers would be £2,300 richer in consequence."

"The blackmailer is responsible for the embezzlement and all of us are responsible for the blackmail."

"And you're right. I can't guarantee he wouldn't be prosecuted for that as well."

The internal telephone rang. Harris lifted the receiver. "Yes," he said, "bring it in right away." He turned to Bridie. "That stuff he flushed down the lavatory. They've pieced it together."

Sergeant Anderson brought the scrap book in. He had made a pretty job with cellotape. "There's a little missing. But the gist of it is perfectly clear."

Harris opened it, looked at the first page in bewilderment. It was an account of a divorce action, with photographs of counsel, plaintiff, co-respondent. He flicked over the other pages. They were all the same sort of thing, legal reports, from the *Express* or *Evening Standard* mostly. "I suppose one person occurs in all of these," he said.

"That's the idea, sir," Sergeant Anderson said.

"Well, who it is?"

"I'm afraid it is Mr. Melville Carr, sir."

Harris whistled. "We'll have to handle this with kid gloves. Get me the boss, Bridie."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

AN END TO THE END

Melville Carr left the court with a reasonable feeling of confidence. Of course any case with a jury was tricky, especially when it involved as this did questions of sexual behaviour. There is such a disparity between what people regard as sexual propriety and the practice of each individual. But he had shaken the most dangerous of the witnesses for the prosecution, a middle-aged woman who was clearly using what she regarded as common decency to conceal an uncommon malice. The phrase had gone home with the jury and old Dymchurch had smiled. He was a judge who liked a bit of intrusive wit.

Patterson met him in the corridor and walked with him to the robing room. "What news out of the outside world, my good and trusty clerk?"

"There's a letter from the Lord Chancellor's office, sir," Patterson opened the door of the robing room and stood aside to allow Carr to pass.

"Don't tell me that we've been turned down, Patterson."

"Hardly, sir." Patterson said with a dutiful chuckle. "Our friends think you should have taken silk some time ago."

Carr went to his locker and took off his wig. "Being a Queen's Counsel can be a risky business. Many a good junior practice has failed in the front row."

Patterson placed the wig in a black japanned box. "I think *we'll* be quite at home there, sir." He took the white neck bands and the gown.

"If *you* think so, I'm reassured, Patterson," Carr said putting on the coat Patterson held for him. "Nothing else?"

"There was Fulham Police Station on the telephone, sir. A Detective Inspector Harris."

"What's *he* want?"

"Could you drop in, sir, at your earliest convenience."

"He didn't say what it was."

"I tried to ascertain, sir, but he was uncommunicative. Except that I received the impression that it was a matter of some consequence."

"Tell them I'll look in on my way home then," Carr said. "And you might telephone Mrs. Carr and warn her I may be late."

Detective Inspector Harris came to the door of his office to meet Melville Carr. He had never actually been in court with him, but he had a hearty respect for his reputation and ability. "It's very kind of you to call in so promptly, Mr. Carr," he said. "This is Sergeant Bridie."

Carr shook the sergeant by his hand. "And what can I do for you?"

"Well, we've got rather a puzzling document, which we'd like you to look at. It might mean more to you than it does to us at the moment."

"It sounds most intriguing," Carr said with an effort at lightness.

Harris opened his drawer and took out a large envelope. "It is," he said. "I wonder what you'll make of it."

Harris and Bridie watched him very closely as he took the scrap book out of the envelope and laid it on the desk before him. He did not try to open it. "Torn in pieces. It's been in water." He was either a very cool customer, Harris and Bridie agreed afterwards, or he had never seen it before. "It was torn in a great hurry," Carr said, flipping through the pages, "three, four pages at a time."

"We were able to reconstruct the tearing, Mr. Carr," Inspector Harris said in a cold voice. "It's the contents on which we want your help."

"Oh my goodness! Yes, I see," Carr said. "The Davenport case. Page v. Page. The Osprey. Where did you get this? Where *did* you get this?" There was a genuineness of surprise, which either meant that he had no idea where it came from, or that he was a superb actor. But of course as a barrister, he *was* a superb actor. "This is all about *me*. But why?"

"Can you think of anyone who might so much . . . what shall I say? . . . *admire* you, that everything you do should be clipped from the newspapers?"

Carr laughed. "My wife does—but then I tell her she's sensible. It's the raw material for *The Cases of Melville Carr*, which might help towards the death duties."

Harris was not amused. "This is very serious, Mr. Carr."

"Then perhaps you will tell me where you found it."

"Certainly," Inspector Harris said. "It was found in the drain of an all-night café called Jack's Snacks on the Kelworth by-pass. Does that ring a bell?"

"I'm afraid it doesn't." Carr was giving nothing away. "Why should it?"

"I just wondered." The inspector looked rather embarrassed, "Because you see about a quarter of an hour before he put this down the lavatory, this young man put a transfer charge call through from the phone box outside the café. And it was to your home number."

"Oh, my God! You mean Barrett! You mean this is his collection of stuff?"

"So you do know Barrett, Mr. Carr?" the inspector said. "You can understand my hesitation. Not that there seemed any reason for doubt, under the circumstances. Except that it seemed an . . . er—rather unlikely friendship."

Carr laughed. "Friendship is not a very suitable word. I gave him a lift in my car. It was pouring with rain . . . one night last summer . . . a thunderstorm. I was stopped at the lights by Waterloo Bridge Road and there he was, looking like a drowned rat, poor kid, and I opened the door and said, 'Hop in'."

"And that's the only time you saw him?"

"Indeed no!" Carr took out a cigarette and the inspector leaned forward and lighted it for him solicitously. "I saw him lots of times after that. Would give him a lift home. I live in Chiswick and he lives in Fulham. I thought he was a nice lad. He amused me."

"In what way did he amuse you, Mr. Carr?" asked the inspector. "Forgive me, but I don't quite see what an eminent counsel might have in common with a wages clerk."

"Don't you?" Carr appeared surprised.

"I'm rather stupid, Mr. Carr. You must forgive me."

"Well, for the first thing, I had the same thing in com-

mon with Barrett that I have with you and Sergeant Bridie."

"You mean," asked the inspector, "that we are all of the same sex."

Carr looked at the two policemen with some hesitation. "I suppose we are," he agreed. "But I didn't mean that."

"Then what did you mean, sir?"

"I meant . . . I hope this is not getting you into deep water—but as a barrister I can only survive in waters of such depth, that Barrett was, like you and Sergeant Bridie and myself and my wife and how many other thousand million human beings living on this earth, different from the rest of creation in the possession of an immortal soul."

The inspector smiled. "This is a debating point, Mr. Carr."

"With you it may be. With me it is an article of faith."

"But the point remains you didn't pick me or Sergeant Bridie up at these traffic lights. You picked up Barrett."

"I gave Barrett a lift. Neither you nor Sergeant Bridie were there. But if you'd once taken shelter in my car during a thunderstorm, I'd certainly have given you a lift another time; until or unless it began to become an imposition."

"Which Barrett did?"

"Yes." Carr nodded. "I got the idea that Barrett was beginning to wait for me. I didn't like that. So I cut it out."

"And that was the end of that?"

"No," Carr said. "I hoped it would be. But it wasn't. He started to be rather a nuisance. Writing. Telephoning. I told my secretary not to take any calls. I threw the letters in the wastepaper basket, unopened. I got an idea . . . you know how vulnerable a man in my position is . . . I got an idea he might be trying to blackmail me. In fact, yesterday,

when he was being a positive nuisance, I warned him, I'd come to you about it—the police, I mean."

"I must thank you, Mr. Carr," Inspector Harris said. "That's helped to fill in the background for us. Been most useful. Most useful."

"But what's happened to the boy?" Carr pointed to the album. "It doesn't explain about all this."

"Well, that's the point, Mr. Carr. You see, we were called in because over two thousand pounds is missing from Barrett's firm, Comfort & King. They'd discovered that he has been falsifying the returns on a dozen different building sites, drawing wages for non-existent workers. When we went along to ask him about it, he did a bunk and we caught up with him in Kelworth. He's not a born crook, that boy; and he's not a blackmailer as you think. He's a victim of some blackmailing racket."

"My God!" Carr said. "You mean *he* was being blackmailed? Are you sure?"

Harris shrugged. "We don't know for sure. But it seems the only explanation. And yet why? If what you tell us is true, Mr. Carr, there's no basis for blackmail."

"What makes you think it has anything to do with homosexuality?"

"Nine cases out of ten are, while the law stands the way it does. That's not my business, the rights and wrongs. But the way the law stands it's the blackmailer's *bonanza*. Barrett won't talk, won't tell us who it is. The only clue I've got is this album, with you on every page . . ."

"I tell you it's as innocent as a child's fairy tale."

Harris smiled. "I'm told that children's fairy tales mean all sorts of things we never dreamed of, when we were young."

"The whole thing's a nightmare," Carr said. "It's nonsense from beginning to end."

"The end was a deficit of £2,300."

"Let me talk to Barrett. I'll get the truth out of him." Carr looked at Harris, then at Bridie and back at Harris. The counsel who had been so confident in the defence two hours before was on the defensive.

"I knew you'd say that, sir," Harris remarked. "It's really why I asked you to come along. You're the only person who can break this for us." He turned to Bridie. "Bring Barrett in, Sergeant."

"No," Carr said. "It wouldn't work that way. It'd scare him. Take me to his cell. And I warn you, don't tap it. The only chance we have of getting this story is if I can convince him everything's above board. Though why should he trust me now anyway? I've failed him enough."

Bridie looked at his boss, who nodded and he went out to the next office and disconnected the tape connections. It was easy enough to plug them in again.

"If you don't play fair . . . " Carr said.

"I'm interested in catching those blackmailers," Harris said.

"All right," Carr answered. "Take me to his cell and give me all the time in the world and I'll tell you the answer."

Harris opened the door. "Take Mr. Carr to Cell Number Three," he said. "Leave him there as long as he wants."

The constable got up and took Carr to the cells.

"Here you are, sir!" he said, swinging back the door.

And there was Barrett, hanging by his tie from the bars of the window, his tongue bulging out.

PART TWO

VICTIM 2. A one who suffers severely in body or property through cruel or oppressive treatment.

Oxford English Dictionary.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A SESSION WITH INSPECTOR HARRIS

Melville Carr knew that the memory of that moment would stay in his mind for the rest of his life; that young face congested by the tie into a parody of middle age, an insult to the soul.

But in the first moment that he saw Jack Barrett, he cried out and ran forward and lifted the body. "Get that tie off. Maybe he's not dead."

Of course he was. Carr knew it by the dead weight, the look of the face, no breath, no pulse as they laid him on the bed. But he was still warm. "For God's sake try artificial respiration. I'll get the doctor."

He ran out of the cells. "Get that doctor. You bloody fools, what've you got those peep-holes for if not to look through? Get the doctor at once!"

He raged back to Harris's room. He didn't know what he was saying. His violence against Harris and Bridie was because he knew that he himself was guilty. The kid had been trying to phone him, to appeal for help, no, not help but just to warn him. And by God! he'd turned him away, frightened that he, the great Melville Carr, might be blackmailed. His fear, his arrogance, his lack of pity had taken that tie and pulled it tight about the young man's neck until he was dead.

Inspector Harris was deeply distressed. No one likes

suicides; and in the inquiry the blame would be placed upon the negligence of the men under his command, and so on him. He was shaken.

But he knew that now if ever was the chance to get the truth from Carr. He went to the hospitality cupboard. For Carr he poured a treble whisky and for himself a single. "You need some whisky," he said. "Water or soda?"

"Water," Carr said, dully.

Harris poured the water and passed across the glass. But though Harris drank his own, Carr didn't touch his. "We're all guilty of this," Carr said, looking gloomily at his glass. "*We* are the murderers."

"I'm sorry, sir." Inspector Harris said. "Neither you nor I . . . we didn't kill the lad. He killed himself. If a chain breaks, I don't believe in blaming it on the strong links."

"You wouldn't be a policeman if you did," Carr said, "you'd be a penal reformer."

"As it is," Harris said, "I just ask myself—knowing Barrett *was* the weak link in the chain—what there could have been in your relationship with him which drove him to pay over two thousand pounds to a blackmailer, to take enormous pains to shield you and then to kill himself rather than face interrogation."

Carr said nothing.

"If everything is just as innocent as you say it was, it's jolly queer, isn't it? Sir?"

Carr lifted his glass and took a deep draught. "That's what I don't understand. There's something we don't know."

"Perhaps," Harris said. "But I couldn't agree to that,

unless I knew what you know. You haven't been . . . what shall I say?"

"Entirely co-operative? No, I haven't. But what I've seen . . . I see the difficulty of your position as well as mine . . . you had better get somebody in to take a deposition . . ."

"You've had a shock, sir," Harris said. "I don't want to take advantage of you. We have our means of finding out the truth without tricks like that."

Melville Carr thought he knew all the tricks of their respective trades. "No, I want you to. You can make what use you like of it. But I warn you that I am not going to perjure myself."

The detective inspector called in a stenographer. When she was seated comfortably, Carr said. "You can put in the oath at the beginning and the bible. I don't have to have it here to swear by it."

"The first time I gave young Barrett a lift," he began, "was in the middle of a thunderstorm at the corner of the Strand and Waterloo Bridge Road. He got into the car and I just thought he was a nice kid. But then as I was driving along the Embankment—we turned down Savoy Hill—I realised he was a homosexual."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Harris. "Did he make advances?"

"Good Lord, no." Carr said. "He wasn't a male prostitute or anything like that. But I could feel it. I could feel that what had been actually an act of common decency on my part was to him—well, a pick-up. I'm sure he thought I'd given him a lift, not because he was drenched through, but because I liked the look of him."

"Which you did?"

"Not in that sense, good Lord, no!"

Inspector Harris turned to the stenographer. "You can scrap what you've written. I'll call you, if Mr. Carr really wants to make a deposition." He held out his hand for the notes which had been taken so far and as the stenographer left the room, tore the pages into small pieces and dropped them into the wastepaper basket.

Carr realised with a shock what an appalling blunder the inspector had saved him from; and how unnerved he must have been by Barrett's suicide to have been prepared to make it.

"There is really only one thing," Harris said. "What was there in your relationship with this young man which could possibly have been the basis for blackmail?"

"Nothing," said the barrister. "Absolutely nothing."

"I don't want to probe into your private life, sir," the inspector said. "It's the very last thing I want. All I want is to get a lead on the blackmailer. I'd already reached the conclusion that Barrett was a homosexual—which you confirm . . ."

"I didn't say he was a practising one," Carr said.

"No, you didn't," Harris admitted, "but there has to be some basis for blackmail; some positive act."

"There wasn't. Not with me. Perhaps Barrett . . . with someone else . . . but I know nothing about it."

"I'm not saying that I don't believe you, sir," Harris said. "And yet why was there this scrapbook of clippings about you, the sort of thing . . . if I may say so, a devoted school girl might compile about the man she loved. That leads me to suspect that Barrett had feelings for you, far deeper than you ever imagined, and of course quite different from those you may have had for him."

"I think he did." Carr, now in full control of his emo-

tions, realised how careful Harris was being to steer clear of any imputations against himself. "I didn't realise it. But I think he must have done. Of course that doesn't mean that he was necessarily being blackmailed about me."

"What would you suggest it meant, then?"

"Having met me, a person whose name got in the newspapers . . . perhaps he got a vicarious pleasure in the notoriety. And later, as he got deeper and deeper into trouble, he might have thought I might be able to help him out. Yesterday, for example, he was trying to get hold of me all day."

"You're sure he wasn't being blackmailed at the time you knew him?"

"As positive as I can be about anything."

"Then it must have happened afterwards. And if he had formed an attachment to some other man, he would have stopped those clippings. And yet they go up to three days ago."

"The blackmail may have started after I stopped seeing him; but the incident on which he was being blackmailed might have taken place months, years ago."

"Do you believe that, Mr. Carr?"

"It's the only explanation I can see which fits the facts."

"But is it?"

"Suggest another."

Harris didn't say what he thought, which was that Carr was lying to save his reputation. "Well, here's a suggestion," he said. "At some time or times in his life Barrett has been a practising homosexual. We know from the police at his home there was some sort of trouble of that kind, which was hushed up. Say the blackmailer knows about it and has good evidence: letters, photographs, what

have you? Then Barrett meets you; may have boasted of knowing you. And suddenly a useless bit of grubby information becomes extremely valuable." As Harris elaborated the face-saving fantasy, its plausibility suddenly appealed to him. "He threatens to Barrett that he'll ruin you with a homosexual smear, unless the boy pays up."

"Why doesn't he blackmail *me*?"

"Because he's got *nothing to go on*," Harris said. "He knows that you can't be intimidated. You'd call his bluff straight away. The only danger was that Barrett would get hold of you and you'd advise him what to do."

"My God!" said Carr. "I wonder . . . "

Harris poured them both more whisky, but this time he gave himself a double and Carr a single. "What?"

"I didn't tell you this," Carr said. "I'd almost forgotten about it. You know in my position I get more than my share of attention from the lunatic fringe. But very shortly after I broke with Barrett—couple of days, I suppose—I got an anonymous letter, signed 'Well-wisher' or something, saying 'Be careful of Barrett!' Or something like that."

"Did you keep it?"

"Of course not. I chucked it away. It was posted in W.1., which of course might be Soho, Mayfair, Leicester Square . . . it didn't mean a thing."

Detective Inspector Harris looked at the barrister with intense suspicion. He had just presented Carr with a theory which would enable him, perhaps, to exonerate himself from any blame and hey presto! Carr produced the confirmation of his theory. But without evidence. "Surely that was very unwise."

"Unwise?"

"There was some sort of threat."

"Have you any idea of the tempo of a barrister's life, Inspector? I may be handling two, three, four, five briefs in a week. Each of those has its file, its papers. This other stuff—*that*'s filed in the wastepaper basket."

"And so you haven't the slightest idea who the blackmailer may be?"

"Not the slightest," said Carr, finishing his whisky. "But I'm going to find out, if I possibly can. And I'll tell you what I learn. You haven't got any idea yourself?"

Harris did not answer at once. Carr felt there was a number of possible answers which he might have given. It was like a ball spinning in a roulette wheel, almost a matter of chance where his choice of reply would fall.

"You know the laws of slander, sir, as well as I do. So it's hard to answer. I can say definitely that we suspect that this is a very widespread blackmail gang, concentrating on homosexuality; because, frankly, that's where most of the money's to be made. I mean, the laws about fraud, for example, roughly correspond with public opinion about fraud. You can expose a man for fraud, but it's damn difficult to blackmail him. But homosexuality—that's different. There are thousands of people in this country—God knows why, because it always seems to me a messy business—but they're made that way or they've grown up that way. They don't accept the law the way it is and so they are open to blackmail—because they'd be ruined, if they were exposed to the law." Harris was watching Carr. "I don't mean they've done anything. They haven't necessarily. I know a bishop . . . he's a wonderful man . . . but he doesn't like women. He prefers men . . . very innocent . . . but that's the way he's made. I can't prove he's being blackmailed

by this lot. But I think he is. I think he'd have committed suicide before now, if he wasn't frightened of eternal damnation. He's very ill. He's killing himself, like an Australian bushman, to get away from this curse."

Carr got up and shook his hand. "So you're really a penal reformer, after all," he said.

"No," said Inspector Harris, "I'm a policeman. I want to enforce the law. But when the law isn't accepted by public opinion, you get the double code. Food restrictions which aren't accepted produce a black market; and the easiest way of stamping it out is to ease the restrictions. Until they change the homosexuality laws, we'll have a black market—or rather blackmail market—in sex."

Carr stood up. He had spent nearly a couple of hours at the station. "If there's anything more I can do," he said, shaking the inspector's hand, "just let me know."

"There is just one thing, sir," said the inspector. "And I don't want your answer to it yet. Supposing that we find the people behind all this, would you be prepared to go into the witness box and testify?"

"Would I?" repeated Carr, suddenly seeing the possibilities of an examining counsel with a person like himself in the box, the insinuations, the inevitable loss of reputation and the business which results from a good name. It was the situation Scott and Laura had been discussing the night before. And he answered Harris as he had answered his wife. "I don't know," and he added, "Let's find the bastards first."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LYING IN THE MORGUE

Laura Carr had spent an uneasy day. She could not get the boy's voice out of her mind. But it was no longer the hint of pansiness which struck her; but the fear, the urgency and even at such a moment, when she suspected he was in great trouble himself, Barrett's concern with her husband's danger.

She told herself that she trusted Mel (the nickname which, she thought, was her own speciality—but which, she noted with a pang, young Barrett had used). But she did not trust him enough to ring him up during the day to ask if everything was all right.

When Patterson called her to say that Mr. Carr would be late, she said, "There's nothing wrong, is there?"

"Nothing wrong at all, Mrs. Carr," he answered. "In fact, Mr. Carr has some very gratifying news for you, though I doubt it will come as any more of a surprise to you than it did to me."

"About the silk, you mean?"

"I think Mr. Carr would like to be the first to tell you," Patterson said. "So I hope you'll express the sentiments due."

Patterson's heavy coyness rather irritated Laura. Though Mel had pretended to be uncertain whether his application would be accepted, before making it he had waited until

from hints dropped from above made its acceptance a certainty. He was too proud a man to risk rejection.

"And this place he's going to on the way home, what's the telephone number in case anybody wants him?"

"It's Fulham Police Station, Mrs. Carr; a Detective Inspector Harris. But I shouldn't think it'll keep him very long."

Two hours later Laura was beginning to worry. One of her fantasies was that Mel would be hurt in a car smash—perhaps be mortally injured. She began to wonder whether she shouldn't telephone the police station to find out if he were still there. In fact she was looking up the number in the directory, when she heard the front door open.

She went out and called, "What happened to you, darling? I was beginning to . . . " But before she had time to say 'get worried', she saw his face. "My God, what's happened?"

At that moment Mrs. Brooks came from the kitchen, wanting to know if she should serve dinner. (There were times when Laura cursed the lack of privacy which the luxury of having domestic servants imposed.) With tight-lipped self-control Mel said, "Could you ask Brooks to put the car away? And could you hold the dinner back another twenty minutes? I need a drink."

It was a casserole, Mrs. Brooks said, and so it would not be completely ruined. She had a soft spot for Mr. Carr.

Mel came upstairs and kissed Laura—not the usual uxorial back-from-the-office kiss, but one which conveyed his pressing need for her comfort. Then he took her hand and they went into the drawing-room.

"Is it Barrett?" she asked, as he closed the door.

Mel nodded. "Hanged himself in his cell. This afternoon."

"Oh, no!"

He turned away and went to the bar and stood with his back to her, pretending to mix a drink. But she knew he was weeping. She had never seen him weep or even imagined it as something which he could possibly do. A mean part of herself was shot with jealousy, 'crying for that fancy boy'. And then she was filled with tenderness at the sight of his grief. She wanted to go behind him and hold him in her arms and lay her cheek against his back. But she thought he would want to be alone till he had mastered himself. He poured out a whisky and water. His hand was shaking.

"Could you give me one, too?" she said. It gave him further respite. He poured her a drink, then took out his handkerchief and blew his nose and surreptitiously wiped his eyes. Then he picked up the glasses and turned and came towards her.

She took the glass he handed her and raised it. "For better or for worse," she said.

He looked at her in surprise. "You mean that?"

She nodded and drew him on to the sofa. "Tell me what happened," she said.

Any severe shock produces a numbness which forms a sort of cushion against the full force of the shock. It wasn't until after dinner when Mrs. Brooks had brought in the coffee that Laura began to think of the effect which Barrett's suicide might have on Mel's career. "Patterson told me you had some good news," she said.

"The Lord Chancellor's Office wrote." Mel got up and walked to the other end of the room. "I haven't really

thought it out. I suppose I ought to withdraw my application."

"You can't, Mel," she said. "What makes you think that?"

"I don't want to bring the office of Queen's Counsel into disgrace."

"But I don't see, my love. If you withdraw your application, it's an admission of guilt. And you're not guilty."

Mel punched the palm of his left hand with his right fist and started grinding it round like a pestle in a mortar—a very irritating gesture.

"Or are you?" his wife asked. "You *must* tell me."

He clutched the fist in his hand.

"You must be honest with me, Mel."

"Yes. I must." He turned to face her. "I told you last night that I had nothing physically to do with Jack Barrett —nothing."

"That's not the important thing," Laura said.

"It's the all-important thing, from a legal point of view."

"I'm talking about *us*."

"So am I," he said. "Having established the one legal point." He came back and sat on a stool at Laura's feet and took her hands in his. "I ought to swear by Almighty God that I am going to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But there isn't a Bible."

"I'll take it without." Laura looked into his eyes, filled with conflict.

"It may mean the end of our marriage, if I tell you."

"If you don't," she answered, "it certainly will."

"I just saw this boy standing at the corner. I opened the door. 'Hop in,' I said and he hopped in." Mel's eyes were no longer looking at hers. They were focused on the past,

which was as present as the messages coming through a radio-telescope from galaxies eight thousand million light years ago. Laura did not exist in that emotional dimension. "The moment he got in, I knew he was homo. I thought it was some awful reversion of mine—a recidivism, isn't it?—made me pick on him. As we were driving west, he talked. I felt he was myself—as I was at his age, desperate about this feeling of difference. I tried to reassure him—that it wasn't an inborn thing—one could grow out of it, as I had."

"You were jolly quick off the mark, weren't you?" Laura said.

"One is. It's like a photograph; as instantaneous. And I was so happy with you; and trying to convey to him that happiness. And when I dropped him in the Fulham Road I thought I'd given him some hope."

"But it was the wrong sort?" his wife said wryly.

"If I'd known what wonderful reserves of sympathy you had, I'd have told you about him, when he started deliberately flagging me for a lift," Mel said. "I could have brought him here, shown him what I really meant, talking about the possibilities of happiness with a woman."

Laura said, "You couldn't. I'd have sent him away with a flea in his ear."

"That's what I was afraid of," Mel said. "And yet I was so anxious to get him right—as I'd got right. This awful missionary zeal."

She was not quite sure how cured her husband was. But she did know that she would need a manipulation to make her able to bear children.

"And then suddenly I realised," he said, "this talking about being queer and getting normal was only fixing this

boy, Barrett, all the closer on me. It was frightening. I can tell you."

"Because you were falling in love with him?"

"I didn't think so. I thought I was making headway. But I was . . . instead of getting him out of his mess, I was going back. And I believe that was what he wanted me to do, right from the beginning. You know some of them *are* incurable. He was one. He had only been stringing me along. And when I saw I couldn't help him to normality, I cut it off completely."

Laura was very cold and far away from him when she repeated her question, "You were falling in love with him?"

Her husband nodded. "I was."

"With that awful nancy voice?" Laura asked.

"You've heard it. I wouldn't say it was very awful, a few more years at school might have helped him. And not very nancy either."

"And now he's hanged himself?" asked Laura, "and so I don't have to worry about your awful missionary zeal any longer? Unless you choose to convert someone else."

Melville Carr looked with horror at the woman to whom he had revealed himself. She was his enemy. "I shouldn't have told you Laura, what I really felt."

"I'm extremely glad you did," she answered, getting up. "And I hope you spend a good night in the slip-room."

"Good-night," Mel said. He went back to the bar and poured himself another whisky. He thought not of Laura, but of Barrett, lying cold and stiff in the morgue.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LATE LETTER

Next morning Detective Sergeant Bridie rang Mrs. Pascoe's door bell at 9.15.

"Hullo," Mrs. Pascoe said. "Come for another cup o' tea? Did you find him?"

"We did, yes," he said. "But he got away, poor kid, an' we'll never reach him where he's gone now."

"Oh, *no*!" Mrs. Pascoe said, her good heart wrung with pity and her curiosity. "You don't surely mean . . .?"

"God rest his soul," said Sergeant Bridie, "there never was a crime on the statute book worth stringing yerself up by the neck. The kid could have got away, if only he'd told what he knew."

"Did you ever now?" Mrs. Pascoe said. "You must come in and have a cup and tell me all about it."

"And have that Eddy of yours slipping out the basement the way he did when we came the day before last? I'd lose me the stripes," said Bridie. "I'm going in to see the lad right now."

"But he's asleep," said Mrs. Pascoe. "He don't get back till the early hours."

"All the better then, but where's his room?" asked Bridie.

"It isn't fair on the boy."

"He wasn't fair on Barrett. If he'd told us all he knew,

Barrett might be alive today," Bridie said. "Now where's he sleep?"

This suggestion was so startling to Mrs. Pascoe that she showed the sergeant up to the first floor back. "You'd like a cup o' tea, the two of you?"

"A good idea, mum," Bridie said. "Thank you."

He went in and turned on the light. The curtains were drawn tight. Eddy had smoked a cigarette before going to sleep. There was a smell of stale tobacco smoke. He was curled in his bed like a baby in the womb and he whimpered as he became conscious of the light.

Bridie went across and pulled open the curtains. The back of the house looked out on the backs of a dozen other houses, little cell yards with soot-black bricks. Eddy opened his eyes and looked blearily around. "Waz 'app'ning?"

Bridie came over to the bed. "I'm one of the policemen who was knocking on the door a couple of days ago when you were slipping up the area steps with Barrett's bag," he said.

"What the hell you doing here?" Eddy asked.

"I've come to tell you Barrett's dead." Bridie said. "He hung himself, because you wouldn't tell Constable Adams what this was all about."

Eddy sat up in bed. "Oh God. I don't believe it."

"You'll believe it when you read it in the evening papers, sonny. But I want to know what you can tell me before those bloody blackmailers who were squeezing Barrett read it too. This is going to be the alert for them. Who is it?"

"I dunno."

"You know Melville Carr was involved?"

"What if he was?"

Bridie sat on the bed. It was a mistake. It aroused all

Eddy's suspicions. "You knew he was, but you wouldn't tell us anything."

"I'm not telling you anything now, neither," Eddy said.

"But Barrett was your friend."

"And he's dead. Sod what's happened to the money."

"I'm talking about Carr. Carr's up to the neck in this. If you want to clear him, you'd better tell us what you know."

From downstairs came the noise of the whistling kettle. Mrs. Pascoe would be up any moment.

"I don't know," Eddy said. "I know there was some chap but Jack never told me who. If Carr's got it coming to him, let him take it. I don't care."

"And you don't care who killed your friend?"

"You killed my friend," Eddy said, "and I do care. And for God's sake get out of my room. What right have you got barging in here, waking me up and asking me why you killed him?"

There was a tap on the door, Mrs. Pascoe with the tea. "Can I come in?"

"Stay out!" shouted Eddy. "You drink mine with the copper."

Bridie stood up. "Play it your way," he said. "But watch your step."

Eddy tried to go to sleep. But the thought of poor old Barrett wouldn't leave him. Jack was the first person his own age he knew who had died. He closed his eyes and in his imagination saw him hanging. "In the midst of life, we are in death." He could hear the sounds of life in the house, the traffic in the mews outside, somebody banging crates.

He got out of bed and went to the bathroom on the

half landing, with his towel and bag. When he had washed and shaved, he came out and Mrs. Pascoe was saying goodbye to the copper in the hall. The bastard. All coppers are bastards.

Just as he finished dressing, there was another tap on his door. Mrs. Pascoe again. "Come in, Ma," he said. He brushed his lapels but there was a spot wouldn't come off. "Sorry I blew off, Ma."

"It's his job, son," Mrs. Pascoe said. "I brought you a cup all the same."

She put it down on the commode. "Oh, and I forgot!" She rummaged in her apron pocket. "These come the other day and I put 'em with mine, meaning to give 'em you and clean forgot."

She handed him some letters. "Hope they're not urgent."

"Urgent!" Eddy laughed. "Who'd write to me Urgent? Unless it was a bill. That'd be urgent, a bill would." He drank the tea at a gulp and handed the cup and saucer back to her.

When she went out he opened the letters. There was one from his mum in Swindon. He opened it and glanced through it. Poor old mum. All she knew was to write what went wrong: Mrs. Henry with her screws something horrible and the outside lav frozen up and Jimmy down the road run over. Then there were the catalogues, both seedsmen's. Eddy wrote for catalogues advertised in newspapers. They helped him to belong. He was a busy man imaginatively. He had a market garden and it passed the time getting the best out of it in his imagintion. He looked at the last letter. It was in a buff business envelope of the cheapest sort, and the address was a perforated label stuck on. It was for Mr. J. Barrett. Typical of Ma Pascoe. He wondered what

he should do with it. Pass it to that copper bastard? The copper had as good as said they were out to frame him and this would put him in right. But he could open it and say that Mrs. Pascoe had given it him as his. The gum was rotten anyway. He pulled the flap up without tearing it. Inside was a postcard. No message. Just a postcard photograph. "My God!" said Eddy.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ASSIGNMENT FOR EDDY

As he came out of Court 4, Mel almost ran into Scott. "My dear old Mel, congratulations," Scott said. "Silk at forty. The Bench at fifty. You'll be Lord Chancellor before you're through." And then he saw his brother-in-law's face. "God, you've got a hangover, old boy."

"It isn't a hangover," Mel said. "But you're right, I'm not feeling too good."

"Early to bed," Scott said. "Too much midnight oil makes Mel a sick boy. I must rush."

'Oh God,' thought Mel walking towards his chambers, 'I wish . . . I wish . . . if it was only that!'

As he went in, he noticed a rough type sitting in the hall; a young man who gave a sort of start of recognition as he came in. "D'you want me?" he asked.

"Yes sir."

Carr could see Murgatroyd, one-legged war-veteran telephonist-receptionist, ready to explain. This meant that

the young man was not one of those dozens who came to a barrister without realising that the approach had to be made through a solicitor. "All right. Come in. But I can only spare you a minute."

They went into his office and, as they passed by her, Miss Slingsbee got up to take shorthand notes. "It's all right, Priscilla, I'll call you, if I need you." Why had the life of a public man to be so very public? Carr showed the young man in. As he closed the door behind them, Carr said, "I really am madly busy. I can only give you that minute. Who are you?"

"I digged with Barrett, sir," Eddy said. "My name's Stone, Eddy Stone. You wouldn't know me. But I thought you ought to see this." He handed over the buff envelope.

Mel did not open it. "You were a friend of Barrett's?"

"About the only one, I'd say. I mean, real. That is apart from you." There was nothing insinuating in his tone.

Carr opened the envelope and the postcard fell out and fluttered to the floor. He picked it up from where it lay face downwards on the thick Persian carpet. He turned it over. He saw Jack getting out of the Rolls-Bentley, tears streaming down his face and an expression on his own face of a grief far more appalling than he remembered feeling. He knew the conclusion that he could make a jury draw from such a picture. It was damning. "How did you get this? It's addressed to Barrett!"

"It came three days ago, sir. But Mrs. Pascoe—she's our landlady—she's absent-minded and give it me—gave it me, I mean, this morning all mixed up with mine and as this copper been round snooping on you, I opened it and thought I oughter tell you."

Mr. Carr, who had said that he was so busy, put away

the photograph in the most leisurely fashion and then he turned and looked at Eddy Stone for a very long time. His gaze was most disconcerting. But Eddy Stone held it. "Why you're looking at me like that?" he said.

"Was I?" Mr. Carr stopped looking at him like that. "Any idea who sent that photograph?"

"I dunno." Eddy said. "I thought you would."

Carr was still uncertain whether this young man was an agent of the blackmailer. "There is no message?"

"Just like it is," Eddy said, "except I opened the envelope." Eddy craned his head to see the photograph on the desk. It was of Laura. 'Quite a piece,' thought Eddy, 'if you like that sort of thing.'

The telephone rang. Carr picked it up. "Let Patterson take it," Carr said.

"It is Mr. Patterson," the girl said, "to remind you you're in court in twenty-seven minutes' time."

"I know. Tell him to take my calls." Carr looked at the clock. He put down the receiver and turned back to Eddy. "I suppose Barrett was trying to buy the negative back, but they kept sending these prints."

"I dunno," Eddy said, "but I reckoned you'd know how to deal with it. There was a Sergeant Bridie round to my place, a proper bastard, while I was still taking a kip. Wanted to know what I knew. Wouldn't tell him a damn thing."

"You don't know a damn thing anyway!" Carr said. "You're quite right." He put the photograph back in the envelope. "I wish I could find out who's behind that bloody business."

Eddy said nothing.

"Got no leads, I suppose?"

"I dunno."

Carr gave him a cigarette and lit it. Eddy drew the smoke into his lungs and expelled it gratefully.

"We met in the Chequers."

"You mean?"

"Could be," Eddy said. "There's some queer fish there..."

Carr took out his pocket book and removed a five-pound note and handed it to Eddy. "Will you do something for me? Just listen around there. Or any place else you may think. Let me know."

Eddy looked at the five-pound note. He had never held one in his life before. Carr saw the conflict on his face. "Give it back." Carr gave him four pound notes, a ten shilling note, and the change in his pocket. "There's more if you need it, Stone. But you'll have to account for it to Patterson, as I do. Good luck to you. I've got fifty quid for the man who could say who was squeezing Jack Barrett."

"That's an assignment, Mr. Carr?" asked Eddy.

"A what?" Carr asked, not having seen many movies. "Oh, you mean a promise? Yes, of course. Hang around. But don't get sozzled."

Eddy grinned. "I won't. I work nights."

It was a bit of all right. Eddy'd had a hot tip on a horse. He bought the midday *Standard* and went to the bus-stop. He looked through the selections. Quare Boy was in the two-thirty at Doncaster, second favourite at 5 to 2. The *Morning Advertiser* napped Dark Tidings and *Sporting Life* napped Lawsuit. By the time he reached the Chequers, he had made his plan for the day, a complicated shilling win

accumulator on Winter's four mounts, which he then cross-doubled and backed separately. He handed the slip to the barman Fred, who was used to his usual shilling each way double. "Cor," said Fred, "robbed the offertory box?"

"Won a bit on the dogs," Eddy said. "Small Dairymaid."

"Dairymaid?" Fred said. "Didn't think you liked *Dairymaids* any size."

Madge exploded with laughter. She'd forgotten the slap of two days before. "Oh dear," she said, "Did you hear that, Henry? Oh I do like that! And you're blushing, Eddy. Look Fred, Eddy's blushing! You haven't got any Dairy*men*, have you Fred? I do like a nice fresh Dairy*man*. A big one." She went off into another peal of laughter. But Henry standing beside her didn't laugh. "You didn't get it, Henry," said Madge. "Eddy here says . . . "

But Eddy wasn't there. He'd gone over and sat at a little table against the wall, which gave as good an overall view of the bar as you could get with all the booths. And Henry sloped off without accepting the return for the drink he'd bought Madge.

"Have a drink, Fred," Madge said, "I'm in funds. Modelling for Mandrake; this new stuff of I.C.Y.'s—Stylon. It's smashing. The very latest. The buyers are tumbling over themselves to get it."

Fred took a light ale. "Course he's down, Henry is." Fred said. "Sold 'is lickle gold mine."

"Not the shop?"

"Fred Nickols told me. But keep it under your hat, love."

"But after he built it up . . . what in the world for, Fred? It just doesn't make sense."

"It makes lot of sense, if you're like Henry is," Fred said. "Which you and I 're not. I can't see why you bother with him, Madge."

"Meaning what?" Madge asked. She was fifteen years older than Fred and a couple of cuts above, but at forty, standards relax like the stomach muscles.

"Like what you want to think," Fred said. "Barkis is willing for almost anything."

"You don't look much of a dairyman to me," Madge said. She didn't often make a joke and no one laughed at it.

Eddy sat at his sleuth-like vantage post, watching Madge and Henry and then Frank and at the same time watching the people who were listening to them. In one booth was the old man they called P.H. He was blind and his eyes were a very light blue like ice in the shade of snow. He had white hair like an old man and an absolutely smooth pink complexion like a choir boy. He had hearing like a bat's. He leant forward on his white blind man's stick, listening with his bat's ears, nudging Micky by his side. Micky was just the opposite to P.H. He was in his early thirties with lines on his forehead and tortoise-bags under his eyes. He was slightly hard of hearing but he had cat's eyes. He didn't miss a thing. He could see in the dark, thought Eddy; anything, if only it was dirty enough. They were a pair, those two, like the fish back home which he used to catch at the entrance of the sewerage into the stream. They were listening to all this talk between Madge and Fred. They weren't so interested in Fred propositioning Madge as they were in Henry's selling up his shop. Henry was fey. Eddy had known he was fey from the first moment he had seen him sweeping his barber's comb through his Brylcreemed

cowlick, holding his head slightly to one side as he looked in the mirror above the cash-register.

P.H. and Micky were fey too, but in a buttoned-up, us-against-the-world way. They were anti-bodies. Eddy had heard the phrase in hospital; and from then on he had divided people into anti-bodies and pro-bodies. People like Jack Barrett were split; the anti-body balanced the pro-body and made them into no-bodies.

In the next booth to P.H. and Micky there was another chap also listening in to the conversation between Madge and Fred. He was an Insignificant sort of City Bastard. At his ticket office Eddy had plenty of chances to observe and type business passengers. Lowest in the income bracket came the Inferior City Bastards. Above them were the Up-and-Coming (who in their earlier years were the Cocky) City Bastards. When these reached their forties, they became the Swaggering Bastards. In their fifties they became Bossy Bastards or Insignificant City Bastards. After retirement, they usually vanished from Eddy's scene. But when he saw them, as he did occasionally, he registered them as poor old Bastards. This chap had reached the insignificant stage.

He was an odd chap to see in the Chequers, that business-man executive's suit which didn't quite fit him; almost as if he had been to Clarkson's to hire it. And he was listening for all he was worth, as he toyed with a tonic water, to the conversation between Fred and Madge.

"You know why I stay on in this dump?" Fred said.

Madge looked at her watch. "I've got to get to the studios."

"You don't want to know why I stay in this dump."

"I'm sorry, Fred," Madge said. "I like my Dairymen a bit older. I know my age."

Eddy went to the bar and ordered a liver-sausage sandwich and a half of mild. "That geezer in the booth," he said to Fred, "who is he? Never seen him before."

"No more've I," Fred said.

Elsa was polishing glasses. "Got a very good job in the City, he has," she said. "Never drinks more than a tonic. Because he's a tea taster. Would spoil his palate, it would."

"Really? You surprise me." Eddy couldn't imagine a soft drink more calculated to spoil a palate, unless it was Coco-Cola. "What'll you have, Elsa duck?"

"I'm a light-ale," she said.

But why on earth did the Insignificant Bastard go into a pub at all? thought Eddy.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LUNCH HOUR IN A BOOKSHOP

Mr. Doe never made a thing of lunch. Just a snack. Something tasty. With pickled walnuts or a bismarck herring on the side. Dinner was his meal, a nice glass of red wine with a kindred spirit, and a delicate offal, calves kidneys in sherry, sweetbreads, chicken liver risotto, a tender dish of tripe. Dinner was the crown of his day. He let himself go after the shop was closed.

But during the day, keeping the shop open all lunch

time with Miss Benham going out, as of course being in the position she was she had to, Mr. Doe contented himself with sandwiches: liver paste on rye bread and sliced raw onion and cayenne pepper, for example; or, as today, cracker biscuits and an assortment of cheeses, a little St. Paulin and Harzkase with onions and cayenne. And over it he read his mid-day *Standard*, picking his fancy flutter.

He bet in units of ten shillings where Eddy bet in single bobs. But he never did more than one horse and that to win. Doe's nap, he called it. He didn't mind how little he won so long as he didn't lose. He would choose a horse at 9 to 4 on, if he felt sure it would win rather than one at 5 to 2 against, about which he felt a doubt. At the end of the racing season he was in front twenty times out of twenty-five. But he was never tempted to increase his stake. "Punting stimulates the pepsins," he told Miss Benham in his whimsical way.

But today he did not even turn to the racing page. As he looked at the right hand headline PAS SEUL FANCIED he caught a headline to the left, 'Suicide in Cell', and read on.

Suicide in Cell
Stole £2000 and made an end

Jack Barrett, aged 23, a building wages clerk arrested at Kelworth the night before last, charged with embezzling over £2,300 from his employers, Messrs. Comfort & King over the past five months, was found hanging by his tie in his cell in Fulham Police Station last night.

Barrett admitted taking the money. But on being asked to produce it, he said that he had spent it all. Blackmail is suspected as the motive for embezzlement.

The police are following certain clues, which will lead to arrest only if the public will co-operate. "We already know who

these people are," said a representative of the C.I.D., "but we cannot secure a prosecution unless the public will co-operate. Of all the crimes with which we have to deal, blackmail is the vilest."

Immunity Guarranteed

Asked why anyone, guilty of an offence which might make him subject to blackmail, should volunteer to give evidence, the C.I.D. spokesman answered. "We view the growth of this blackmail racket as such a danger to society, that we are prepared to guarantee anonymity to the offence which has formed the basis for blackmail."

Mr. Doe read it with a curve of onion in his hand, and as he did so, a tear flowed down his cheek, provoked either by the onion juice or by emotion.

Miss Benham came in to say that she was going out to lunch, but seeing Mr. Doe in tears she paused longer than usual. "What's the matter?" she asked, in a voice which would have been strange from an employee to her boss, if Miss Benham had not been so obviously the daughter of the late Rear Admiral Sir Roderick Benham, who had inherited her father's trait of looking on the world as her quarter-deck.

Snuffling and feeling for the handkerchief tissues which served him for most physical occasions (including stuffing his ears), Mr. Doe turned the paper round so that she could read it and pointed to the Barrett story. He looked up at her, a badly carved figurehead of a woman, hoping to see on her face some emotion for which he could lend her a tissue handkerchief. But she read it quite unmoved.

"What about it?" she asked. "I'm not surprised, considering the state he was in. Are you?"

"I thought . . . I just hoped. I don't know . . . I always thought he might come back. He was a really good boy."

"I'm sorry," Miss Benham said, "for you. But you must

remember that your private life has nothing to do with me." She returned his paper the right way. "Sometimes I think you forget."

"What?" asked Doe aggressively. "What do I forget?"

"That I'm only your assistant in this bookshop. Your very complicated private life has nothing to do with me." She lifted up a dozen envelopes as anonymous as the one which Eddy had handed Melville Carr. "My job is just to post these and then to have some lunch."

"I know," said Mr. Doe looking back at the headline.

"It isn't fair to ask an employee to concern herself with her employer's emotional problems, is it? Considering how much *he* gets?"

"I wouldn't say it was all that much," Mr. Doe said, bitterly.

Miss Benham went to the door. "Time is money," she said gaily. "But I think you'll agree. A little money is better than a long time. Wouldn't you say so, Mr. Doe?"

Mr. Doe looked at her turquoise hard-blue eyes, searching them for a trace of understanding. There was none. "You must be hungry," he said and looked down at his own plate until she left. "*Domine noster, qui es in coelis,*" he thought to himself, "*Sanctificetur nomen tuum*". The Latin of his innocence like a spring welling up through a deluge of mud. "Oh Lord, lighten our darkness, we beseech thee."

But it was no use. It was no use at all. All the new leaves he had turned over in his life had been defaced with failure and weakness and obscenity. He stared at the cracker biscuits and the cheese platter. Hunger had gone. If only life could go as easily. He envied Barrett the courage to have made an end; but it was a risk he could not take him-

self, eternal damnation was worse even than the hell in which he lived on earth. The shop bell rang and Mr. Doe stood up to see who it was. It was some scarecrow of a teddy boy with side whiskers. Mr. Doe put the remains of his lunch in the cupboard and went into the shop.

This young thug was looking round as if he was casing the joint. It was one of Mr. Doe's terrors that he might, some lunch hour when he was alone in the shop, be held up by armed bandits. He clutched the elaborate water pistol which he kept in his jacket pocket against such emergencies.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"You got a book called *Drawl Stories*?" the thug asked.

"Called . . . what?"

"*Drawl Stories* . . . one of the chaps at the Jiminy Jive said you'd got it. Chap called Balls-ack wrote it, 'e said. But I don't go by it, 'e was ribbin' me . . . " His jaws were going the whole time on a stick of gum, like some ruminant. Mr. Doe wondered how long it would be before gum-chewing humanity would undergo an evolutionary change; and would they develop two stomachs? or none?

"Would you like it in French or in English, illustrated or the plain text?" asked Mr. Doe.

"Gimme the one with pickshers. An' the lushest you've got."

Mr. Doe showed his possible editions. The fruitiest was a German edition of the late twenties. "That is rather expensive," Mr. Doe said, "I don't know if you understand German."

"I always wanted to learn," the boy said. "This'll make me do it. Looking at them pictures and picking out the words to find out what it's all about. Make it last longer. What about a German Dic?"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A WARNING

Eddy was just about to go, when Phip came into the Chequers. Under his natty check hat Phip was looking terrible. "Have a drink," Eddy said, "You look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I will, dear boy," Phip said, lowering his carcase on a bar stool as if it was a sack of coal. "I have."

"What?"

Phip put his evening paper on the bar and tapped the story "Suicide in Cell". He looked at Eddy. "You saw it? Then you know why I'm feeling like a double Haig."

"And do I look like a double whisky?" Eddy asked.

"Make it half of mild and I'll pay the difference for a single," Phip said. "Golly, when Dad and Uncle James and Aunt Maria kick their respective buckets, won't I repay you, Eddy boy?"

"Double Haig, Elsa," Eddy said, and then seeing Phip's open eyes. "Won on the dogs last night."

Phil took the glass from Elsa and poured a very little water in the whisky and twirled the stem of the glass round to mix it. "I liked Jack Barrett," he said, "and if I could have got him out of town, I would have done. I swear it."

"But what made him do it?" asked Eddy. "I don't understand. Why did he steal all that money. He never spent any of it."

Phip raised his rather bloodshot eyes and looked at Eddy in pity. "You don't know? You really don't know, Eddy boyo?"

Eddy shook his head.

Phip whispered. "I've got to go to the Boys' Room. Get me one and take it over to the booth. I think you need a little education, boyo."

Eddy had another double Haig poured into Phip's glass. He could not drink any more himself with the rush hour in front of him.

Phip came to the booth full of confidences. "Keep out of it, Eddy boyo," Phip said. "Mind your step. I'm warning you. Don't put a foot wrong. This is worse than the police, if you understand me, boyo. It's a police within the police. If you've got to be the way you are, be it somewhere else. If they haven't got you yet."

"I know it's blackmail," Eddy said, "but who's behind it?"

Phip gripped Eddy by the wrist in what Eddy thought was an advance. Phip had always had a thing about him, but then he saw that the blind man was going out with Micky, his satellite weirdie.

Phip waited until they left. "You shouldn't flatter yourself, boyo. And you shouldn't blow your mouth off."

Eddy lifted his glass from the table. There was a circle of mild on the table. He wrote in beer. 'WHO?'

"I don't know," Phip whispered in a voice which convinced Eddy that even if he did, he wouldn't tell. "Keep away!"

"They're on to you too?" asked Eddy.

"Who said that?" Phip looked at him with his whisky-congested face aflame.

Eddy got up. "That's why you never have the price of a drink. And I just thought you were mean."

Phip put his hand on Eddy's. "Kid," he said. "Listen."

Eddy looked down at him, the chin descending beneath his jaw-line like a canvas sheet sagging. "What?"

Phip let go. "Hell on earth," he said. "There is such a thing. Keep out of it, kid." There was no doubt that Phip was in it.

The time was up. He had to get on duty. But as Eddy ran to catch his bus, he thought of what he might have said. 'I want to help you out of it' and things like that. He had earned his money, working for Melville Carr and with any luck his bets would show a profit.

We are all of us split personalities. The moment Eddy took over from Leslie at the ticket office, there was so much to do that he forgot about Barrett, Melville Carr, Phip, Henry, P.H., and the rest. Besides, Eddy didn't want to telephone until he got his mind straight. If he got his mind straight, he might become a private eye. A big barrister must want a private eye. He must need one with all these cases coming up: a confidential agent. People came up every so often saying Charing Cross or a fivepenny or Perivale, which he could do mechanically. There was no reason why an electronic ticket office couldn't issue them as well as he did, perhaps quicker. But every so often an old lady came along asking about a return ticket to South-end. That would burn up an electronic ticket officer.

It burned up Eddy too.

In a lull just before four, he called Melville Carr's office. He was put through to Miss Slingsbee. Her voice was charged like a cow-wire. "Who wants him?"

"Tell him it's Mr. Stone."

"I don't know if he's in. Can you tell me what it's about?"

Eddy gave his number. "He knows what it's about. I got a spare moment now. If he's not there, he can call me after seven o'clock when the rush hour's over."

There wasn't even the pretence of handing over. Carr had been listening the whole time. Eddy could hear Carr sending the woman out of the room. "Any news, Stone?"

"You know Henry's, the hairdresser, just off Shepherd's Market?"

"I could find it," Carr said.

"It's a little gold mine. But Henry's sold it. He's going away. Wait a mo!"

He sold two tickets to Turnham Green and one to Willesden, plus a threepenny and a fivepenny. On the underground, passengers hive like bees.

"There's another chap, called Phip . . . least that's what we call him . . . works for Cavendish Motors. They've got the springs on him. But I think he's too scared."

"This Phip, what's he called?"

"He say's he'll be the Earl of Balmorris, when somebody dies—but I don't believe it. Anyway, I must ring off."

"So must I," Carr said, doing so. He turned to Miss Slingsbee.

"I'd like to know a bit about the Earl of Balmorris, the heirs especially."

"Which particular one?"

"That's for you to say, when you've done the research." The telephone rang again. Carr picked it up. "What?" He nodded to his secretary to go away. "Put her on, of course."

He glanced at the photograph of Laura on his desk. She

looked so lovely, so free of care. But her voice wasn't free of care, as it came across. "Will you be back early, Mel?"

"I don't know. There's a lot to be cleared up."

"It's this Barrett business. Scott's been on to me. I'm beginning to see . . . "

"I'll be back when I can . . . "

"Don't ring off, Mel. This is important. Scott's explained. You've got to DISENTANGLE. You understand?"

"I knew Scott would say that."

"But do you agree? Say you agree."

"I'm sorry, my dear, but I'm busy." He put down the receiver and drove round to Shepherd's Market. Despite its murky reputation he had always loved this part of London. He found a place to park and started to look for Henry's.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

HENRY'S

Henry was an artist. He felt about hair. When a stranger came into his shop, Henry looked at him like a Harley Street specialist examining a new patient. What was the problem: balding, greyness, dandruff, a double crown, common hair? A lot of wealthy people who had oodles of money were given away by their common hair. It was coarse or it grew wrong. Henry could tell and he had given a great deal of study to the correction or disguise of this commonness. Hair drill, thought and higher hair training

could do a great deal to educate the vulgar scalp. Aubrey Calloway, for example, had one of the coarsest scalps Henry had ever seen, when he first came to him; which had been many years before, when Calloway was a struggling actor resting a month for every week he worked, and Henry was a humble assistant in Finklestein's, Westbourne Grove.

Off and on, Henry had dressed Calloway's hair for twenty years. In fact Henry swore that Calloway would never have got where he was at the top of the bill in the West End Theatre, if it hadn't been for the intimate relation he had with Calloway on the highest trichological level in the old days of Denham Studios. "I made Calloway," he was fond of saying to Madge towards closing time at the Chequers, "scalpwise." He had hinted to Calloway that he might benefit to take him on as his general factotum. "With a head like yours," he would say, "you should never be far away from a man who understands it. That rebellious hair needs a master hand."

But Calloway had never risen to the bait. "We'd be bad for one another, my dear," Calloway said, "we've far too much in common."

Mr. Calloway had been very good, all the same, what with the hampers from Fortnum's during the recurrent troubles, and the help for starting again when the trouble was over. He was the most loyal of clients.

So when Mr. Calloway came in for his appointment, Henry, during one of the less dramatic moments of the treatment, said, "I'm sorry to say, Mr. Calloway, this is the last time I shall be able to help you."

"Oh, my dear Henry, not again. I do hope not."

"No. I'm going abroad," he said. "I think I've reached the age."

"To retire? I wish I had."

Henry was telling no one what he intended to do, so he lied. "A change of climate," he said. "I thought of Nice or Cannes or maybe Monte Carlo. Somewhere in the sun."

"But what am I going to do without my dear friend?" Aubrey Calloway said. "I know that every hair of my head is numbered, but you keep so much better a count than anybody else."

"That has been my chief anxiety," Henry said. "I think the only other man in London who could understand your problems is Thompson of Maison François in Bruton Street. I've had a serious talk with him about your difficulties."

"Anyone might think I was a delinquent."

"Not you, sir," Henry said, getting to work on the hair in his ears, "but your trichology definitely is."

The door opened and the man who had been in the Chequers came in; it was the tea-taster. He hung up his hat, revealing a lower-middle-class Brylcreemed growth, receding into an artificial widow's peak at the temples, greying slightly at the cheekbones. Then he picked up a copy of *Life* and pretended to look at it, while looking at Henry or Calloway or both of them in the mirror.

"What's wrong?" Calloway whispered.

Henry looked to see how his assistant, George, was getting on with his patient. Henry did not want to serve this tea-taster. "Have you time, Mr. Calloway?" he asked. "I'd like to give you a free vibro massage for auld lang syne."

"And I'd love to receive it, old friend," Calloway said. "But I've got an appointment."

He took a five pound note out of his wallet. "If you won't need it," he said, "give it to one of us who does.

Good luck. And let me know if you ever come back to these parts." As he shook Henry's hand, he whispered. "I don't like the look of that guy. Be careful, chum."

While Henry brushed the coat of Aubrey Calloway and helped him on with his overcoat, the tea-taster took his seat in the chair.

Henry went and stood behind him, "What do you want, sir?"

"Short at the back and sides," the tea-taster said. Henry looked at him critically, his head on one side, the barber's apron over his arm. "I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I'm afraid there's nothing I can do for you."

"I just want a trim," the tea-taster said.

Henry shook his head. "It's more than my reputation's worth. I don't know where you went last time, but I couldn't start to model you, sir, for at least a week. There's nothing to *go on*."

The tea-taster looked surprised. "It's rather an odd way to speak to a customer."

"I'm an artist, sir," Henry said. "And from my point of view, you are rather an odd customer." He picked up the clothes brush. "You'll forgive me," he said, and brushed some visible scurf from the tea-taster's collar. "Could I interest you in a bottle of my Dandreolene Scalp-freshener?"

The tea-taster bought a small bottle for 5/6d. and as he took his change, he said quietly, "I've seen you in the Chequers, haven't I?"

"A sharp personal friction night and morning, rubbing in with the tips of the fingers," Henry said. "That should settle your trouble, sir."

"I'd rather like to have a word . . . "

Henry went and opened the door. "I'm sorry, I can't do any more for you at the moment, sir," he said.

As the tea-taster went out, an attractive-looking toff with a good head of hair stepped aside. He had an unrolled umbrella, pin-stripe trousers, dark Savile Row-cut overcoat with a black velvet collar. A successful barrister type. Henry had never seen him before in the flesh, but he knew who he was. He turned to his assistant, George, who had been listening in astonishment to the conversation with the tea-taster—Henry being notoriously a type who led his customers on to spend as much as possible on the luxuries of hairdressing: vibro-massage, frictions and facials.

"O.K., George," Henry said. "I shan't be needing you any more tonight. I put an envelope in your jacket-pocket."

Henry hadn't told George that he had sold the shop and would have a new boss as from tomorrow. The note in the envelope explained that; and enclosed with it a week's salary.

It was still five minutes before closing time and the reference to the envelope was obscure, but George could take a hint. He went back, took off his barber's coat and put on his jacket and overcoat. "Good-night, Mr. Swanson," he said. "See you tomorrow."

"Good-night, George," Mr. Swanson said. He had the legal type in the chair and after George left, he bolted the door and pulled down the blind. That was understandable, George thought, if Henry wanted to get away early—though his policy had always been to stay open late if the customers were coming. Henry had been a very good friend in some tight places. He could of course be a bitch

at times, but this legal eagle didn't seem quite his type. He liked 'em young.

As he went out, George saw a real brawny piece astride a Lambretta, with one of those smart, manly, leatherette windproofers, and very tightly curled hair, a real pug, with such muscles and a quite passionate mouth. He was most attractive and George gave a little wriggle of his hips as he passed, but the young man glared at him and then spat on the pavement by his feet. It was rather disconcerting. 'He hasn't found his vocation yet, poor dear,' George thought and crossed the road.

There in the doorway of The Trianon Furnishing Store was a figure which turned away from him, as he approached. It was the man who had come into Henry's and been turned so surprisingly away. 'A rozzer, a plain-clothes rozzer,' George thought. 'I ought to telephone Henry-Penry.' But then he realised that the reason why Henry had been so short with that type in the shop was because he already knew who the man was. He went in to the Duke of Wellington and bought a drink and opened the envelope. The note read, "Bless you, Georgie-Porgie. I'm off. Hans Fingerinbaum has bought the shop. He wants you in on Monday. Have a couple of days in Brighton. Love. Henry."

Melville Carr watched the hairdresser bolt the door and then he turned, the still not entirely ignoble ruin of a distinguished-looking man. His hair was like a pork-butcher's, swept in a coif to cover baldness, but those side-whiskers, those heavily lidded eyes had a Wildean distinction; and the mouth, framed in the inverted V of

depression from the nostrils showed a tremulous sensitivity.

"Well," said Henry Swanson. "What can I do for you?"

"My name is Melville Carr."

"I've seen your photograph," Henry said. The suspicion was plain on his face.

"I'm a friend of Jack Barrett."

"Barrett's dead," said the barber, for whom friendship died with the friend.

Carr nodded. "I want to find out who drove him to it." Younger, stronger and with the authority of his position, Carr tried to dominate the barber. But Henry was not to be dominated. He said. "I'd've thought you were in a better position to know that than me, Mr. Carr."

"Insinuating what?"

"Only if I'd been in Barrett's shoes and with you for a friend, I'd've gone along to ask for your advice—and help."

"He did," Carr said. "But I didn't realise that he was being blackmailed. I thought that was what he was trying to do to me. I wouldn't listen. You can understand how I feel now."

"Does it matter very much how *you* feel?" asked the barber. "Young Barrett doesn't feel anything, any more. Nothing you can do now will help him."

"That's true," Carr said, "but it might help you."

Henry Swanson took off his barber's coat and hung it on a hook. "If I want your help, I'll ask for it, Mr. Carr." He pointed to the coat. "That's my livelihood. I've just hung it up for the last time. Do you care?" He was so worked up he lost the thread of what he was saying.

"I care about your being blackmailed," Carr said.

"You don't. You don't care a damn about me being

blackmailed. You care about Jack Barrett. And you care about yourself and that wife of yours with her photograph in the society columns."

"But don't you realise we're all in the same boat?" Carr said.

"Same boat! My God!" Henry laughed hysterically. "You come on here with that bloody smart overcoat and you say, 'We're all in the same boat.' Do you realise that I've been inside twelve years of my life—twelve years—just because I'm homosexual. How many years have you spent in prison, Mr. Carr? So far?"

The barber was out of all control. Carr was deeply distressed. "Can't we go somewhere and relax," he said. "We could work out something."

"I've already worked out something—for me," the barber said. "I'm not interested in working out anything for you, Mr. Carr. You're a homosexual . . . "

"That's a lie," Carr broke in.

"Then what are we talking about?" the barber said wearily. "You want me to get another sentence? Just to clear you? Why the hell should you expect me to do that, Mr. Heterosexual Carr, knowing I've got a weak heart? Thank you very much; but I never fell for Barrett anyway. He didn't even collect from you."

Henry Swanson was right in a sense.

"You think you'll get away with it?" Carr asked.

"I've bloody well got to," Swanson said. "I've reached the end of the road."

Carr looked round the chi-chi barber shop. There was nothing he could do. Nothing. The way the law stood, he couldn't ask Henry to sign his death-warrant. "But if you change your mind," he said, "here's my card. My home, my

office telephone. If you want help, ring me any time."

"I'm getting out tonight," Henry said.

"I know," answered Carr. "But if I know that, surely *they* must know it too. I think you need help."

"Do you mean that?" Henry asked with fear in his eyes.

"I'm certain," said Carr, not being certain at all.

The barber hesitated, and for a moment Carr thought he had won his confidence. Then Henry shook his head. "It's my own way, or nothing," he said.

Carr grasped the barber's arm. "Think it over," he said. "I'm there if you want me. I can imagine how you feel."

The barber turned his heavy-lidded eyes towards him. "Can you?" he asked sceptically.

Looking into those corn-flower blue but slightly blood-shot eyes was like staring down the corridor of Henry Swanson's past, through the immediate agony of his present desperation, past the recurrent jail-terms and the times of liberty to the schoolboy innocence of the boy scout or chorister, who some forty years before had tripped on the threshold of maturity. Once again for a moment Carr felt that Swanson was weakening, then he went and unbolted the door. "I can't help you, sir," he said. "I'm sorry. But I've had all I can take."

Carr went out and walked to his car. He was so filled with sorrow that he had been defeated at the very last moment that he didn't notice that someone was following him. The tea-taster was unobserved by anyone, including the tough, curly-haired man on the Lambretta who had been so busy watching Henry's shop that he had no eyes for anybody for anything else.

This is how most tragedies happen. We are so taken up

with our own affairs that we do not see what is happening to others. Tragedy is the child of neglect.

Carr drove away. The watcher saw him leave and went off to make his report. And the young man on the Lambretta, who had looked as if he was waiting for his girl, got off and lit a cigarette and started to pace up and down outside Henry's, taking care not to be seen from inside and watching who might come along. It was lucky that Henry's was in a cul-de-sac.

The lights in the shop went out, but the window light remained on. The young man leaned against the doorway, smoking his cigarette. He was listening to every sound: the distant traffic, the footsteps of someone coming from the place next door and passing him, a terrible girl with stiletto heels all tarted up and luckily so self-conscious about how attractive she thought she was that she didn't throw him a look.

She passed hoity-toitily, was gone round the corner, when the shop door latch clicked. The young man flung his cigarette in the gutter, tensed, listening for the door opening. Look to left, look to right. Jump in the doorway, push the old geezer back in and shut the door. Lean back against it, fix the lock before he recovers.

"What the hell? I say. What're you up to?" the old geezer said.

"Want a lickle talk," the young man said. "You don't know me, Henry, but I know *you*."

Henry made to switch on the shop lights.

"No," the young man said. "We don't want no light on the subject. I can see you very well as it is."

"Who the hell are you?" Henry asked. "What's all this about?"

"Can't you guess?" the young man asked. "Can't you recognise me by the typewriter. I'm your pen-pal."

There was the light in the window, shining in Henry's eyes, but the young stranger was in shadow. That chi-chi screen he had erected, which framed the picture of the head of John the Baptist with the most perfect hair-do, cut him off from the street and chance of safety. "What've you come for?" Henry asked.

"Re-lax, dear friend," the young man said. "You ought to take one of your own treatments." He studied the hairdresser's price list, then he came towards Henry. "A nice facial ought to do *you*, I think," he said in a sneering voice.

"I've got no business to do with you."

"Oh but you *have*, Henry, that's where you're wrong," said the young man. "You been a very nice pen-pal to me so far, Henry. Always regular with the rent. I wouldn't want to lose the connection. When I heard you'd sold this lickle gold-mine, I was proper worried. I was more than worried. I couldn't see how you was going to meet your commitments . . . might even be trying to dodge 'em. In our line of business that's something we can't abide. The sort of protection we give is an expensive business. You got to keep up the payments regular see, else you lose the service. Get me?"

Henry said nothing. He looked round his shop in search of weapons, the bottles, the clippers, the drawer in which he kept the cut-throat razors. "And why shouldn't I sell the shop if I want?" he asked.

"No reason, Henry. So long as you keep us posted. But," said the young man, "when you don't say a word to us about this move—and I mean to say, if it wasn't for us, you'd be inside tomorrow—and then I come along to

check up and what do I see? Jack Barrett's boy-friend, Melville Carr. Looks bad, Henry. It looks very bad."

"I didn't tell him a thing," Henry said. "I give you my word for it. He suddenly comes in here, but I didn't know anything about it. And I didn't say nothing. I swear."

All this time the young man had been standing with his back against the light and against the door and Henry had been standing with his face to the light and his back towards a wall which gave him no chance of escape. But now the young man took a step forward. "I think you're trying to scarper," he said.

Henry saw the young man's eyes wander round the saloon, the bottles, mirrors, basins. "Give me five minutes," the young man said, "and there'd be precious little to sell, would there?"

"You couldn't," whispered Henry. But the sight of that young thug's face was enough to convince him that he not only could, but *would* with the greatest of pleasure.

"Now what did you say to Melville Snooping Carr, Henry?"

"I've told you. I didn't say a thing, I swear it." His voice rose shrill with fear. "On my honour!"

"Honour! That's a rich one." The young man picked up a hair dryer and held it like a hatchet. "Come on. No funny business, or I'll . . . "

Henry pushed forward. "Don't! Don't!" He was in the agony of innocence, nothing to tell but the truth and the truth not enough to save his precious shop.

With the butt of his left palm the young man handed Henry off, sending him crashing back among the chairs. Then he smashed the dryer into a mirror and swept a line of bottles to the floor.

"Now will you talk, you old queen?"

There was Henry lying on the floor. He was struggling to rise. No, not to rise. Something had gone wrong. His face was an awful colour and he was holding his chest. The young man had never seen a heart attack, but this, he guessed, was it.

He looked at the handle of the broken dryer. Then he grabbed a towel and wiped off his fingerprints. Then with a cursory glance at the gasping hairdresser he strode to the door, opened it with a handkerchief over his hand and let himself out.

A moment later Henry heard the Lambretta splutter and then steadily fire. He closed his eyes with pain, but when the spasm passed, he opened them again, seeing the wreckage of the mirror and the bottles on the floor. "Telephone," he gasped, "must telephone."

There it was on its bracket, close to his barber's chair. It seemed a mile away as he edged towards it.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"TRY CARAWAY"

Scott was with Laura when Mel got back to Chiswick. Mel could tell that they had been talking about him before he arrived. There was a guilty air of complicity. He poured himself a drink and decided to take the bull by the horns. "Laura's confided in you," he said.

"I hope you don't mind." Scott was decently embarrassed.

"If I can't trust you," Mel answered, "I can't trust anybody."

"If you do trust me," Scott said, "you'll drop the whole thing."

"The police knowing what they do?"

"You've been quite honest with them. But it would be madness to go into the witness box, if they find out who the blackmailers are."

"Do you agree, Laura?"

Laura looked away. "It would wreck your career, Scott says."

"You really think so, Scott?"

"Of course it would."

"If you mean my career as a one hundred per cent heterosexual husband, I should have thought that was already wrecked. I'm not, any more than ninety per cent of men are, whatever they pretend. And I've never concealed the truth from Laura."

"But there's no need to shout it from the housetops. If you admit the tendency, everybody will infer the practice." Scott said.

"You remember the other night we were talking about blackmail and I said I didn't know what I'd do. Well, I've worked it out now. Honesty isn't only the best policy—it's the only policy. Think of it. They didn't try to blackmail me. They knew they couldn't. I'd call their bluff, because there was nothing they could blackmail me with. But if I refuse to go into the witness box for the police there *is* something to blackmail me with. It's an admission of guilt. Don't you see? From a purely selfish point of view I've got to do what I ought to do from a social and moral point of view."

"And the publicity, the damage to your career, the humiliation Laura will feel . . .?"

"Will she?" Mel turned to his wife. "Laura, will you feel humiliation if I behave in the way you said was the only proper way to behave?"

Laura got up and took a cigarette from the box on the mantelshelf. "I suppose I ought to be very proud of you," she said bitterly. "But it isn't going to be nice and I can't pretend that it is."

Both men stepped forward to give her a light. Scott was slightly beforehand, but she took the light from her husband. He said, "That's why I told you all about myself before we married."

"But I wasn't to know that your fatal charm towards your own sex would continue. You swore that was all over."

"It is."

"And yet this Barrett boy is dead," Laura said.

"What I can't understand from what you've said," Scott intervened, "is what hold they had over Barrett, seeing that everything was so innocent."

Mel took out his wallett and produced the photograph. "Perhaps this will explain it."

Scott glanced at it and then held it so that his sister could see it too. "Half a dozen of these circulated through the legal profession . . . yes, I see. But why on earth didn't he come to you straight away?"

"He did," Mel groaned. "As I told Laura. But I thought that *he* was trying to blackmail *me*. I wouldn't see him. Told him I'd inform the police in the end."

Laura went on staring at the photograph. "Oh Mel!"

"What?"

"You told me you weren't in love with him."

"I wasn't."

She handed him the photograph. "Look at the expression on your face."

Carr looked. He wasn't crying as Barrett was; but there was no doubt he was labouring from some deep emotion—as indeed he had been—or rather not one, a whole mass of complicated and conflicting emotions: lust, desperation at discovering that he had not grown out of the feelings which he thought were dead, pity for the boy, fear for himself. "I told you I wanted him," he said. "I didn't *love* him—as he did me. If he hadn't, he'd be alive today."

"And so what are you going to do?" Scott asked. "Just wait and see how much the police find out?"

"I shall do what they want me to do."

"Really?" Scott said, smiling.

"I mean it."

"So you've shown this photograph to them?"

"Of course I haven't. They'd have kept it otherwise."

"And you don't think they might find out more about it than you'll be able to?"

Carr flushed at the insinuation. "You may be right. It never even occurred to me. It should have, of course."

"Don't get me wrong, Mel," Scott said. "I don't mean you ought to have done."

"Then what the hell do you mean?"

"Just this plea of being honest, so much more honest than most of us are . . . I'm glad to see that you don't take it too far."

"I'll take the police into my confidence in good time," Carr said.

"I know," Scott answered. "But I hope you won't keep Laura out of it, until too late."

It was a good exit line and Scott took it. After he left, Mel said, "I was obliged he called you 'Laura' and not 'my sister'. I was expecting that any moment."

"I'm sorry if he's disappointed you," Laura said. "I'm afraid we both have."

"Why you? Considering the shock, I think you've been marvellous. And if you feel you can't bear it and want to go, any time . . . well, I shall understand."

Laura looked at him with an expression he did not understand. "You really mean that?" She could not imagine that if he really loved her, he could bear to be parted from her at such a time.

"Of course," he answered, not realising that a woman could accept suffering with her husband more readily than being pushed on one side into a painless security. Laura would have been capable of almost any sacrifice of pride and status, if she had felt that her husband needed her. His old-fashioned desire to protect her from scandal convinced her of his indifference.

"All right," she said, "if that's the way you feel, that's the way you can have it."

"I know it's horrible for you, Laura," he said. "I was going to suggest you might like to go away, until it all blows over."

At that moment Mrs. Brooks came in to announce dinner. "And Mr. Carr," she said, "I forgot to tell you, there was a call. A rather odd one. It was just before Madam came back from the clinic."

"You didn't tell me about this, Mrs. Brooks," Laura said.

"It was for Mr. Carr, Madam," Mrs. Brooks said. "The party had a rather high voice and I couldn't tell if it was a lady or gentleman. But there was something very strange about it, I couldn't make out what exactly, either ill or, if you'll pardon me, a lot the worse for drink."

"Who was it?" Carr asked.

"The voice didn't say," Mrs. Brooks explained. "But I got the message. I wrote it down. It said, 'Tell Mr. Carr, try Caraway'. And then it stopped."

"You mean he rang off?"

"No," Mrs. Brooks said. "There was a sort of thud, like the receiver being dropped. And then a funny noise, very queer it was."

"Caraway?" said Carr. "You're quite sure about that?"

"I'm certain," Mrs. Brooks said, "because I thought what a strange coincidence it was, because I was just making a seed cake."

As they went down to dinner, Laura said softly, "Who's Caraway?"

"I don't know," said her husband. "I don't even know who telephoned."

PART THREE

VICTIM 2b. One who is reduced or destined to suffer under some oppressive or destructive agency.

Oxford English Dictionary

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE WIG AND GOWN

Eddy went in to collect his winnings from the Chequers next morning. "Well, you're a lucky old lucky," Fred said. "Six pounds six shillings and eightpence . . . Not at all bad, if you do it every day. What's it going to be at Kempton Park?"

"Haven't looked yet," Eddy said, producing his mid-day *Standard*. "Got to work out the form."

"Still a small Dairymaid?"

"She seems lucky."

"Luckier than poor old Henry," Fred said. He took a Dairymaid, uncapped it and poured it out.

"What d'you mean?"

"You didn't hear about Henry?" Fred leaned across the bar, eyes popping, as he dropped his voice.

"Wouldn't be asking you about him, if I had."

"It was proper 'orrible," Fred said. "I don't like this place. Tell you where I'd like to be: on the Welsh border—the English side—nice walking distance for them Taffies to come across Sundays and sink a gallon after evensong. I reckon a good manager could make a small fortune running a Welsh boozer just across the border."

"What about Henry?"

"Konked it. Last night. After selling the shop. Just like I told you, yesterday. And the place was all smashed up. It

was a proper shambles, it really was; the Gillette blades all mixed up with the Brylcreem."

"Golly," Eddy said, "what did they do? Beat 'im up?"

"And to think it isn't twenty-four hours ago he was sitting on that very stool you're sitting on now!" Fred said. "Course he had a dickey heart, but there's got to be an inquest. When I come by, there was coppers all over the shop, thick as blowflies on a dead rabbit."

Eddy had got off the stool at the mention that it was the one Henry had sat on. "Makes you think, eh? 'In the midst of life we're in death' as they say. First Jack Barrett and now old Henry."

"He was trying to telephone," Fred said. "I reckon this Teddy boy comes in, starts knocking the place about and Henry tries to call the police and pegs out as he's doing it."

Eddy looked round. The blind man and Micky were sitting in their usual booth listening.

"How's old Madge taken it?" Eddy asked.

"She's not bin in. She's got this job with old Mandrake. It'll hit 'er when she hears, though. She was real fond of old Henry."

Eddy downed his Dairymaid. "Think I'll drop round and have a look myself."

"You won't see anything," Fred said. "Not now, you won't."

Eddy said he'd try all the same. He wanted to telephone Carr, but not from the Chequers in front of P.H. and Micky, and Fred.

As he walked round to Henry's place, he tried to figure out what had happened. It was pretty obvious. The gang had heard Henry had sold out and had smashed up his

shop to teach him a lesson. Just before he reached the end of the cul-de-sac in which Henry's shop was, he remembered Phip's earnest advice to watch his step. It was just as well he did. He stopped and bought a mid-day *Evening News* and looked up the narrow street. A police car was parked outside the shop, but though there were no bobbies in sight, he noticed a vaguely familiar figure strolling away from him on the opposite side of the street. At that moment, the figure turned and Eddy saw it was the tea-taster from the Chequers. What on earth was he doing there?

He went to the Post Office fifty yards further on. After ten minutes he got through to Carr's chambers. There was the usual business of being passed from the switchboard to Miss Slingsbee, that block of office ice. But when she heard Eddy's name, she melted. "Mr. Carr is in court," she said, "but Mr. Patterson can take a message. Did you want to see Mr. Carr? Could you manage the Wig and Gown Club in Fetter Passage at ten past one? It's just off Fetter Lane, you can't miss it. Just ask for Mr. Carr."

The Wig and Gown Club was designed for discretion. Barristers, solicitors and their clients met there between sessions to discuss urgent business. Though Eddy Stone felt rather embarrassed about going in, because it was not his sort of place after all, he was soon put at his ease. No one was snooty and Carr was waiting for him in a little corner booth with padded horsehair seats which was almost like a private room. "Try the steak and kidney pudding," Carr said, "it's the speciality of the house. And a pint of draught Guinness."

Carr listened quietly while Eddy told what he had heard

Eddy said about the telephone. "You're quite sure of that?"

"It's what Fred said. I dunno."

"Go on then." And from there on, he just nodded, until Eddy ended with the description of the tea-taster. "Who d'you think he is?" Carr asked. "Got no idea at all of his name?"

"I could see if Fred could find out. Doesn't know it at the moment, I'm pretty sure."

"It's not worth it," Carr said. "If he's up to no good, you wouldn't find out; and if he isn't, it wouldn't matter. Does the name Caraway mean anything to you?"

Eddy shook his head. But when Carr told him of the message of the evening before and his suspicion that it might have been from Henry, Eddy's face cleared. "Not Caraway. Calloway. Old Henry was never tired of telling how he made Calloway 'scalpwise'."

"Not Aubrey Calloway?" Carr said.

"That's the one."

"Lend me that paper of yours," Carr said, taking the *Evening News*. He turned to the Entertainments page and ran his finger down, till he came to Parthenon: *The Passionate Pastor*, Aubrey Calloway, Miriam Haywood; Ev. 7.45. Mat. Wed., Sat. 2.30.

Then he re-folded the paper and handed it back. "Need any more money?"

"I got plenty."

"Splendid. You're doing fine, Stone. Let me know if you hear anything more. That chap Phip really is related to the Earl of Balmorris, by the way. But quite a lot of people will have to die before *he* can take a seat in the

House of Lords. Might be worth while to find out who he goes around with." He glanced at his watch, scribbled his name on the bill and put five shillings on the plate for the waiter. "I've got to fly."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

BACKSTAGE AT THE PARTHENON

Aubrey Calloway wiped the cold cream off his face with a towel. "Hallo, Melville," he said. "I didn't realise you were out front. How did you like it?"

"I'm afraid I wasn't. I was performing before Mr. Justice Balkwill in the Court of Probate, Divorce and Admiralty."

"Probate presumably with such a judge," said Calloway helping himself to a liqueur chocolate. "Have one, dear boy, but don't take a crème de menthe." He peered into the glass gloomily. "Isn't age bloody? Don't tell me you want me to open a bazaar in aid of paraplegics. I've fulfilled my charity quota for the next three months."

"Nothing like that," Carr said. "There's a little problem come my way, and I think you could help."

"I could try," Aubrey agreed. "But forensically I'm so ignorant I never thought to teach you a tort. I am, in fact, untort."

"It is something," Melville glanced at the dresser, a willowy young man with long, fine, sparse hair, "rather private."

You hear that, Dorian," Aubrey said. "Mr. Carr requests the pleasure of your absence at this party." As the dresser left, Calloway said, "His real name is Leslie, but I call him Dorian because I'm going grey." He took a Marcovitch and lit it, drawing the air into his still sensitive, though slightly coarsened, nostrils. "Now tell Miss Lonely Hearts your little problem, dear boy."

Carr took out his wallet and removed a folded buff envelope. "I want you to look at this," he said.

Calloway took it and when he saw the little stick-on address label with the name of Jack Barrett and his address, Carr could see his start of fear and surprise, though he tried to suppress it. "I'm afraid I don't understand. If this is meant to be a joke, Carr, I fail to see it."

"It isn't a joke," Carr answered. "It's a blackmail envelope."

"Then I suggest the place for it is a pigeonhole in Scotland Yard, not in my dressing room."

"Perhaps you're right. But I thought I'd come to see you first."

"May I ask what inspired you to draw your bow at this particular venture."

"Who, not what?" Melville corrected.

"Who, then?" Calloway did not seem to care that his hostility showed that he must know something.

"Henry." Carr said. Calloway was going to ask something like, "And who's 'Henry'?" when Carr added, "Just before he died."

"*Died?*" Calloway stubbed his cigarette in the ashtray. "It's impossible. I don't believe it. You mean Henry Swanson?"

"The hairdresser."

"But he cut my hair yesterday afternoon."

"And he talked to me after you left."

"And he told you . . . "

"He admitted he was being blackmailed. He was selling up—wanted to make a break of it. But he wouldn't tell me who was blackmailing him. He was too scared, poor devil."

"Then I fail to understand why . . . " He gestured round the room.

"I'm here? I'll tell you. I begged him to reconsider. Gave him my home and office numbers, if he wanted to call me. And when I got home, there was this mysterious message, 'Try Calloway.' It was the last thing he said."

Aubrey Calloway sat slouched at his dressing table. He prodded several times at the remains of his mangled cigarette. Then he looked up at Carr. "So what?"

"So I'm trying."

"I don't understand. I just don't understand."

"He was very devoted to you," Carr said.

"And he's better dead, poor devil," answered Calloway. "But what are you up to? That's what I don't understand?"

"I'll tell you. Two people have died in the last week, blackmailed to death. I want you to tell me just one thing—where do you pass the money over. That's all. I'll keep you out of it."

Calloway stood up. He was a tall man and still physically impressive, though slightly run to seed. "I believe in courtesy even to the uninvited guest, but a limit comes to everything. I utterly repudiate every suggestion you have made and the mere idea of your making them is an intolerable impertinence." He opened the door. "Dorian!" he called to the dresser, waiting in the corridor. "Mr. Carr is

leaving. Please show him to the stage door and tell Potter that Mr. Carr will not be calling again."

He stood aside to let Carr pass. Carr opened his mouth to say something which would repair the breach. They had known one another for over ten years, if not as friends, at least as acquaintances each with a warm appreciation of the other's abilities. "I'm very sorry, Aubrey."

Calloway theatrically ignored him. But as soon as Carr went into the corridor, Calloway closed the door and slipped the bolt. Then he went to the phone on his dressing table and dialled a number. As it rang, he put a cigarette in his mouth, and lit it. He could visualise the studio where the bell was ringing. With each buzz it seemed to get emptier.

Then it stopped ringing and a voice said, "Ambassador 27893." It was Teddy, thank God.

"Hullo, this is Tiny," Calloway said. "I must see you."

"I was just going to Burke's. Why don't we meet there?"

"No, this is . . . this is rather private. Can I come round right away?"

"I was meeting Cecil for a game of snooker."

"Ring him up. Tell him to come round to your place, too. I'd like his views on this."

"You're being very secretive all of a sudden, old boy. You haven't been offered a part in some dreary thriller by any chance?"

"This is serious. Damned serious. But I can't say over the phone." There was a tap on the door. "I'll be round as soon as I can."

He put down the receiver and unbolted the door. Dorian came in. "What was all that in aid of?" Dorian asked.

Calloway pinched the young man's cheek. "Don't ask no

questions, ducky, and you won't be told no lies. I'll be ready in three minutes. Tell Hopkin to bring the car round."

"Are we going to the Gargoyle?" Dorian asked.

"We are not."

"Do you mind if I do then?"

"You can go to the Devil for all I care, so long as you're back by ten past seven. Now be off. Scram. Scoot."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE INSPECTOR CALLS

"Is Mrs. Carr in?" Carr asked Mrs. Brooks.

"She's not back yet. She phoned she was calling in to see Mr. Hankin on the way back from the Clinic. But Lord Fullbrook called; said he would like you to call him back at this number." Carr saw it was not Fullbrook's own number, Ambassador something or other. He was just going in to his study to telephone when Mrs. Brooks added. "There's an Inspector Harris upstairs. He said he'd wait and . . . " And he'd listen to the conversation on the extension, thought Melville. "Fine, I'll go up and see him when I've washed my hands. Tell him I won't be a moment, will you?"

Carr wanted a few minutes to collect himself. He had been deliberately avoiding seeing the police. It committed him too far. While he followed his own line, there was always a chance of pulling back without damaging his

reputation if he found he was getting nowhere. There was so much that was uncertain. He might lose everything, practice, Laura and reputation and still not bring the criminals to book.

Harris was staring gloomily at the Cotman as Carr went in. "Oh, hallo, Inspector, how nice of you to come and see me this time. You like the Cotman?"

"The what, sir?"

"The picture. I like the way it moves."

"It puzzled me," said the inspector. "Why's the waggoner only got three fingers?"

"Has he?"

"It's the first thing I noticed," said the Inspector. "I suppose he only did. But it's worrying."

"It's never worried me; in fact I've never looked at it like that."

"How did he lose the other one?" Harris asked. "It doesn't give a clue."

"Stop worrying, and have a drink!" Carr said.

"No, thank you, sir. Not on duty, if you don't mind. I was wondering how you'd been getting on."

"Do you mind if I do?" Melville Carr asked. "It won't make you slaver?"

"I'm used to it, sir," Harris said. "People feel easier with a policeman if they have a drink in their hands."

"I feel easier at this time of day with a drink in my hand, even if there's no one around. You know that barber, Henry Swanson, was being blackmailed by the same lot?"

"We do, sir. But to tell you the truth I was a bit surprised you didn't tell us *you* knew. I had an idea you were going to keep us posted."

"Well to tell *you* the truth, I didn't know myself there was anything in it till lunchtime."

"When Eddy Stone told you?"

"So you've got your eyes on me all right?"

"We're on this case, sir," Harris said. "We mean to break it. Did you tell Stone the message you got from Henry last night?"

"How did you know I got a message?"

"Somebody was wrecking Henry's shop. Why? Because of the last person who had gone in to the place; which was you. Henry told you nothing at the time, did he?"

Carr shook his head. "He thought he would make a get-away, abroad some place."

"Well, he didn't dial 999. So I reckoned he probably dialled you and your housekeeper kindly told me she'd taken a funny message about Caraway, which was presumably her cook's version of Mr. Aubrey Calloway, whom you visited on your way home."

"You seem to know everything, if I may say so."

"Oh no," the inspector said. "We don't know what passed between you and Mr. Calloway, for example."

"Nothing. He wouldn't admit a thing. It gave him a fearful shock to hear about Henry's death. But I'm sure he knew that Henry was being blackmailed and I'd bet my bottom dollar he's being blackmailed himself. And for the same reason. I'd heard rumours about him too, as you do about every actor who isn't married, but when I saw the type he has for a dresser . . . "

"I'd prefer not to hear any more about that side of the business, sir," Harris said. "If something is forced on our notice, then we have to take cognisance of it. In this case we're not concerned with the moral character of Mr.

Calloway or his dresser, we're out to catch the blackmailer or blackmailers. Because I'm sure there's more than one in it."

"Thank you, Inspector," the barrister said. "I understand your point of view. What do you want me to do?"

"Could I define why you are from the police point of view such an invaluable person," Harris said. "You are a barrister with a reputation above reproach—I understand that very shortly you will inscribe the initials Q.C. after your name . . . "

"One moment . . . " Carr broke in.

"Please sir," Inspector Harris continued, "I repeat, from the police point of view you are above reproach. We would be the first, if defending counsel tried to impugn your moral character, to support your just contention, your very just contention, that the fact that this unfortunate young homosexual, Barrett, conceived a criminal love for you, does not imply that this feeling was in the least bit reciprocated by you."

"I feel bound to warn you," Mel broke in once more.

"The Paul Stainer case? We are perfectly aware of the Paul Stainer case."

"But you don't see?"

"The Coroner thanked you for the clarity of your evidence, Mr. Carr," Inspector Harris said. "He said that without it the jury would have found it less easy to reach that verdict of Suicide While Of Unsound Mind."

"I'm glad we've got that clear. You understand why I raised it, Inspector."

"I do indeed. And I'm glad you raised it. Because it means that we understand one another completely.

Skeletons can be very useful—if they aren't hidden in cupboards. For teaching anatomy, for example."

"What is all this getting at?" Carr asked.

"It is just this. When you went to see your old friend Aubrey Calloway this afternoon, you scared him. He was afraid that we might take action against him. I should hate to see that happen. Whatever Mr. Calloway may be in private life, on the stage he's the dream husband of a million suburban wives."

Carr poured himself another drink. "You're taking a long time to come to the point, Inspector."

"I suppose I am," Harris said blandly, "but I assure you it's because I feel about it very strongly. I believe in the law, as you do. I believe in justice. It must be seen to be done. If you started to prosecute everybody for everything they do wrong, there wouldn't be enough innocent men to keep the rest of the population in jail. And there certainly would not be enough jails. As we both know, justice, is the legal drama we play out with the star offenders to keep the bit-players and the extras in line. For every prosecution, there are twenty offences."

"My wife will be coming back at any moment," Carr said, "I don't know whether you want to continue this philosophical discourse in front of her. But I warn you that *I* should find it embarrassing."

"I'm sorry, sir," the Inspector said. "I did hear your wife drive up. And I'm just going. The point is this: if you could assure Mr. Calloway and his friends that, at least for the moment, we are concerned with blackmail—mind you, I can't tell what sort of Home Secretary we'll get next—they might give you the information we need. That's really all I came to say."

Carr laughed and took his arm as he led him to the door. "Well, I must say, Inspector, you couldn't have said it in a more roundabout or civilised way."

The inspector smiled. "I shall never forget, sir, a remark you made in the Petersen case."

"Don't say I said something original?"

"You probably got it from somebody else, sir. But I hadn't seen it before. It was 'Psychologically speaking the longest distance between two points is a straight line.' "

"Did I say that?" Carr asked.

"I read it in the newspapers," said the inspector.

"I think it's brilliant," Carr said. "I really must try to remember it. Most profound!"

Laura came in to the hall to see them both laughing. Carr had introduced them. "The Inspector's just going," he said, "We've had to me a most enjoyable session."

"I'm so glad that we understand one another," said the inspector. "You know, Mrs. Carr, it is such a pleasure to work with a person like your husband, who understands our difficulties."

"I didn't think you had any difficulties, except those connected with being underpaid," Laura said.

"We have lots, Mrs. Carr. And not the least of them is our fear that people like you—and your husband—might suffer too much in the prosecution of really criminal elements."

The telephone rang. Mrs. Brooks appeared from the kitchen to answer it. "Don't trouble. I'll take it," Carr said. "Forgive me, will you?"

"I'll show the Inspector out," Laura said. She walked with Harris to the door, and held it open.

By the very nature of his job, Harris had to be so much an actor that he never knew quite how much of what he did

was out of plain cold scheming and how much out of loving kindness. The two, he found, tended to dovetail. At any rate, on the doorstep he turned. "There's just one thing, Mrs. Carr," he said. "I'd like to ask you, not on your husband's behalf, but ours. I mean the police's. If you can, that is."

"What is it?" Laura asked.

"Will you try . . . it may be difficult . . . to love your husband very much?"

Laura gasped. A sudden spurt of tears from her eyes made her mascara run and it stung her eyes. "Don't be a fool!" she said and shut the door.

The moment she had shut it, she was conscious of Mrs. Brooks in the kitchen, listening, and Mel telephoning in the study and Scott back in his widowed loveless house, waiting to know whether she would come back to live with him and look after his boy in the holidays. 'If only life,' she thought, 'was simple like it was when we were children!' But of course if it was, we'd never grow up spiritually. She had never mastered the Binomial Theorem at school. She felt that she had reached the same stage in the spirit, a point beyond which she could not progress any further, because everything had become too difficult.

Mel came out of the study. "I've got to go out again, my love," he said.

"But you can't. We've got to talk this over. I've been mulling over it all today."

Mrs. Brooks appeared. "When shall I serve dinner?"

"I've got to go out," said Carr. "I'm sorry. Could you make me some sandwiches? Anything. It doesn't matter."

That got rid of Mrs. Brooks for the moment. "What's this all about?" asked Laura.

"Come into the study," her husband said. "I don't know what it means."

When they had closed the study door, Mel took her in his arms. "I don't know what's going to happen," he said, "but whatever it is, I love you, my darling heart. I love you and only you in the world and if you want to go away, then go away but I'll still love you." He held her in his arms as the most precious person on his earth. "But what *is* going to happen?" Laura asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know, my dearest. But will for me, pray for me. Because I'm lost. I'm lost without you. You got to have *faith* in me. Or I'm lost."

It was a curious thing that all their married life she had thought of Mel as the strong one, the anchor of her drifting personality; Melville Carr, the famous barrister, predestined Q.C., and High Court Judge. But she had never loved that noble image as much as she did this utterly uncertain, unreliable homo-heterosexual creature poised on the brink of ruin.

Mrs. Brooks tapped gently on the door. "The sandwiches, sir."

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

IN MANDRAKE'S STUDIO

Lord Fullbrook put down the receiver. "He *says* he couldn't call before, because he had a detective in the house."

"Is he coming?" Mandrake asked.

"He'll be over right away."

"And I," said Aubrey Calloway, "must be right off. Dorian will be worried stiff, even though I don't appear until the curtain of the first scene. I think you're far better suited to cope with Melville Carr than I am. I never feel quite happy in the upper echelons of advocacy." He had recovered sufficiently from his encounter with Carr to get back to the thickets of verbiage in which he usually browsed.

"Do you think he had?" Teddy Mandrake asked when Aubrey finally left.

"Had what? Who?"

"Carr. A detective in the house. Or would it stampede us?"

"You seem to have stampeded already," Cecil Fullbrook said, "if *one* can stampede. Carr hasn't the vaguest idea what I want to talk to him about. Except that it's something rather important; which in *his* nostrils will smell like a juicy brief."

"I wonder who can be briefing him in this Barrett business?"

"Somebody without much experience of these things," Fullbrook answered.

"Or someone with nothing to lose," suggested Mandrake. "The boy's parents, for example. I must say Tiny didn't handle his interview in the dressing room with any great subtlety."

"He's an actor."

"Lost without his lines. In the thickets of a Wildean undergrowth."

"Secondary scrub," amended Fullbrook, glancing at his watch. "Would you say Carr was a reasonable man?"

Mandrake poured himself a drink. "For you, Cecil?"

"I've had enough. Would he recommend a settlement out of court, if it involved a sacrifice of principle?"

"Doesn't that depend on what his client wants? If it's revenge for the Barrett boy—as it might be if the parents are behind it—money is scarcely what is needed."

"I don't think it is. I don't think it can be. If Barrett had that sort of relationship with his parents, wouldn't he have gone to them in the first place? It's least said, the soonest mended, as far as they're concerned."

"You think it's Comfort & King?" Mandrake asked.

"I think it must be," Fullbrook said. "They can't be blamed for wanting their money back."

The bell rang. "We'll soon see." Mandrake went out into the entrance hall. Carr was surprised to see him. "This is your studio?" he said. "Fullbrook never told me you were in on this."

"Come in and have a drink," Mandrake said. "Quite a lot of us are. Tiny was sorry he had to rush, but the footlights called."

Carr did not have time to ask who Tiny might be before he was in the studio, a large workmanlike room, with for the most part a bare floor, artist's throne, easel, canvasses, but at one end a furnished section, like a garden reclaimed from rough pasture. There Fullbrook was standing warming his bottom in front of a Courtier stove.

"Good of you to come, Carr," he said, "at such short notice. I hope it hasn't wrecked your evening."

"It's my night's sleep it may wreck," Carr said. "I hope it won't take long. I've got a lot of work to do tonight."

"There's no reason why it should. If you'd explained, dear chap, we'd have come over to see you."

"Have a drink before we start?" Mandrake asked.

"I'm driving," Carr said. "I gave Brooks the night off. Can we come straight to business?"

"Certainly," Fullbrook said, in a voice which betrayed no certainty. "Who's briefing you in the Barrett case?"

Carr looked at Fullbrook and then at Mandrake, the first a cigar-puffing Toby Jug, the second vaguely flowerlike, an overblown black tulip. "Briefing? Barrett case? What on *earth* are you talking about?"

"Who are you acting for?" Fullbrook said. "Don't let's quibble about words."

"I don't understand. What the hell's Barrett got to do with you?"

"That, if I may say so," drawled Mandrake, "is the question Fullbrook is asking you, only put a bit more forcibly."

Carr flushed. "I have very good reasons, but I see no reason why I should explain to you what they are."

"And equally we have very good reasons, the explanation of which is quite unnecessary. We are only concerned with finding some suitable compromise with your principals."

"I don't compromise with my principals," Carr answered. "Two people have died, the victims of blackmail, in the last week."

"And how many people have died in the last week as the result of road accidents?" Fullbrook asked. "Really! I thought you had some sense of proportion, Carr. Blackmail is a hazard of modern civilisation, like crossing the road."

"Don't be ridiculous!" Carr said. "They're totally different."

"It's a different sort of accident-proneness," Fullbrook

answered. "We don't have a breakdown of suicides. But I'm willing to bet you anything you like that for every one who commits suicide through blackmail, there's a hundred who commit suicide because they can't pay their Income Tax. Would you charge the Commissioners of Inland Revenue with murder? Or abolish Income Tax?"

Carr looked at Fullbrook in astonishment. "You mean, you condone blackmail?"

"It is part of modern society. A price you have to pay for certain luxuries. It is perfectly easy to avoid paying it; as you can avoid paying spirit duty by becoming a teetotaller; or tobacco-duty by giving up smoking. I like my luxuries, but I take care to indulge only in those I can afford."

"But these blackmailers are criminal!" Carr protested.

Fullbrook laughed. "That's what the Victorians called the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he raised Income Tax from 3d. in the £ to 4½d. You're too legally minded, my dear fellow. The blackmailer is merely a sort of moral accountant, who stands between you and the government. He charges for his services. It's a form of protection."

Carr was utterly bewildered. "I've known you all these years; both of you, at the club. Both of you, well, very distinguished in your professions. And here you are, Fullbrook, defending blackmail!"

"I'm surprised you don't understand," said Mandrake, "because I always thought you yourself possessed what Saki called a 'Tauchnitz morality'. As Cecil says, one has to pay for these deviations from the norm."

"But your attitude is monstrous," Carr said.

"No," Fullbrook replied. "The attitude of the Government is monstrous. The Wolfenden Committee reported that the law that made a criminal offence of homosexuality

between males, in private, above the age of consent should be repealed. There's no law against Lesbianism and there shouldn't be any law against homosexuality between men in private and by mutual consent, if Labouchère hadn't slipped the clause in one evening during a hot August session in the 1880's. Maybe it's a sin, as adultery is a sin. But it isn't a crime, if the two men want to do it."

"I know that," Carr said.

"Well, if you really care about it, don't try to track down the people who were blackmailing Barrett. Just get the law repealed and you cut the ground from under the feet of the blackmailers. If you really want to fix the guilt for the death of this chap Barrett, I can tell you where you'll find the list of his murderers. In Hansard. The people who made Barrett commit suicide, were all the M.P.s who abstained or voted against implementing the Wolfenden recommendations on homosexuality. But of course in our democracy, they were quite right. They wanted to get re-elected; and they were afraid that if they repealed the laws which made homosexuality a crime, they would be regarded as condoning it as a sin. So I suppose it's really the men and women voters who are guilty—they or what politicians think they feel."

Melville Carr had at one moment thought—absurdly—that Fullbrook and Mandrake were the organisers of this blackmail racket. Now he realised that they were themselves practising homosexuals, who accepted blackmail as the price they had to pay for their abnormality. It was all right for them; they could afford it. If the little ones, like Barrett and Henry perished, what did they care? It should teach the blackmailers not to be so greedy.

What astonished Carr was that there were none of the

little signs, gestures or mannerisms in either of the men by which homosexuals deliberately or unconsciously betray their tendencies. He had known Barrett, Henry and Eddy Stone immediately for what they were, but not Fullbrook or Mandrake.

"And you're prepared, you two, to protect these parasites?" Carr asked. "To shield from the police these very people who threaten to denounce you, if you don't pay up?"

"You make it sound very dramatic," Mandrake said with a smile. "But you're not talking to a jury now."

Fullbrook held his cigar upright before him and contemplated its elephant-grey snout of ash. "I am a reasonable man," he said. "And I have always found these people reasonable too. Like me, they are in business; though on the shady side of the street. You don't kill the goose who lays the golden eggs. You just increase his production."

Carr thought there were poultry farmers who increased their egg production until the unfortunate birds ruptured themselves and then were sold as boiling fowls. But he did not want to get bogged down in avicultural analogies. "But you don't positively *enjoy* paying this conscience money," he said. "It isn't some strange appeasement of guilt?"

"It's a bloody nuisance," Fullbrook said, "like the tax on tobacco. Something one has to accept."

"But it isn't," Carr said. "It has no legal sanction. The police want to smash it."

"What we do between ourselves behind closed doors, with both parties freely consenting has no legal sanction either; and the police are out to smash that too with penalties as severe as those for robbery with violence."

"There would be no need to involve you," Carr said.

Fullbrook and Mandrake looked at one another and smiled cynically.

"I know what I'm saying," Carr said.

"And you must also know what the police have been doing for years now. Getting hold of some frightened young man, telling him his pal has confessed and he'll get off more lightly if he comes clean; and then using that confession to get a real confession from the pal and so it goes on till they get a dozen, twenty, thirty others in the bag. Don't tell me you trust a policeman, Carr; because even if *you* do, *I* don't."

"I'm not asking you for anything except how you pass the money. The police want to keep you out of it. They've got ample for a prosecution with the Barrett case, to say nothing of the hairdresser."

Fullbrook flicked the grey ash into a Swedish glass ashtray. "For a man of such forensic eminence you are remarkably naïve, Carr. You must know as well as I do that if the police catch the criminals, they will acquire a mass of incriminating evidence involving a large number of vulnerable people. However amiable your police friend may be, he will have in the line of public duty to pass that evidence over to the Director of Public Prosecutions' office. There it will be purely a matter of chance into whose hands the papers fall. It is possible that they might be seen by a civilised person. I've no doubt there are as many in that office as there are at large in society. But supposing that it falls into the hands of some evangelical non-Conformist or, worse still, into the hands of one of those hearty heterosexuals, who is unconsciously homosexual but trying to cover up by an over-determined normality, then the fat will be in the fire. A sizzling report will go up to the Director,

who will be forced to take action, just because a paper from one of his subordinates is on the file."

Carr was fumbling for an answer to this very cogent objection—he remembered how carefully Harris had refused to promise immunity in the case of any offence brought to his notice—when Mandrake took over. "And just supposing that the Director of Public Prosecutions decided to hush our side of it up, what's to prevent the accused bringing it up, during the trials."

"No judge would allow it," Carr said, "he'd have it struck from the record."

"But it wouldn't be struck from the memory of the jury, the journalists, all those present in the court. It would get around. I don't say it would ruin us financially. People are more understanding today than they were in Wilde's day. But all the same it would cause an intolerable situation."

Carr got up. "So you refuse to help?"

"I'd go very much further than that," Fullbrook said. "I must warn you that I shall, in fact, we shall, refuse. And when I say 'we' I mean a number of very influential people of whom I need say no more than that some of them have brought you very good business in the past, not merely because they valued your ability but also because they sympathised with you over the Stainer case . . . "

At the mention of the Stainer case, Lord Fullbrook paused to see whether his shot had gone home and saw from the look of pain and surprise on the barrister's face that it had done so. "We shall," he continued, "take it as a deliberately unfriendly act if you persist in a course which may cause untold damage to yourself and them."

A pulse of anger beat in Carr's cheek. "I don't like being threatened."

"If you'll wait," Fullbrook said, "you'll see that I am making a constructive suggestion. If, as I suspect, your principals are Comfort & King, my friends and I will see to it that the money they have lost is refunded . . ."

"I'm not interested in getting the money back, I'm . . ."

"In that case, I suggest that you join with us in recovering the compromising documents . . ."

"And photographs . . ." Mandrake interrupted.

"Including photographs," Fullbrook said, "for a substantial sum. Then if at a subsequent date the police should run the blackmailers to earth, it's no concern of ours."

Carr's first reaction was to refuse outright. But if he did so, Fullbrook, Mandrake, Calloway and all the others of whom he had no knowledge would get to work. The mention of the Stainer case was a hint of the way in which they might try to smear his reputation. But they wouldn't rest there. "I'd like to think that over, gentlemen," he said, "and consult." Since they were convinced that he was acting for a principal there was no harm in indulging them. It gave him more time in which to think and perhaps act.

"When shall we hear from you?" Fullbrook asked quickly. "I don't want to waste time."

"Tomorrow evening," Carr said. "What about Burke's? In the library. At 6.15. It's almost always empty then."

Fullbrook looked at Mandrake, who said, "Suits me." Mandrake took the barrister to the door and showed him out. When he came back into the studio, Fullbrook was pouring himself a stiff whisky. "Who's Stainer?" Mandrake said.

"I don't exactly know," Fullbrook said. "It was years ago. They were at Oxford together, I think, Stainer was a sort of hysterical type. Fell in love with Carr. How far it

went I don't know. Anyway, not far enough—or long enough—for Stainer. He threatened to kill himself—Carr told him not to be a bloody fool—and he did it—out of spite, probably. There was quite a stink at the time. Carr was exonerated, of course. But some of the mud stuck. It did him a bit of good, though. Carr was such a nice chap, people gave him briefs out of pity at first—then more briefs because he turned out to be a first class barrister."

"When did he marry Laura Hankin then?"

"About a year after. A number of people think it was a cover-up."

Mandrake poured himself a lager. "I wonder," he said. "I wonder if we're barking up the wrong tree."

"What do you mean?"

"About his principal? Supposing Barrett was his boy-friend?"

Fullbrook emptied his glass and stared at it thoughtfully. "Teddy," he said, "I think you've been rather bright. And in that case, we've nothing more to fear. He'd never risk the police finding evidence to incriminate him." He got up. "You know I'm rather looking forward to tomorrow night."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE STRANGER ON THE RIVER BANK

It was a couple of hours later. Suppressing the names, Carr had told his wife about the interview with Fullbrook and Mandrake. The main thing which concerned him was

whether he, as a uniquely innocent, could take an action which might involve Fullbrook, Mandrake, Calloway and others in ruin. He suddenly felt his liberty of action contracted. But it wasn't what Laura fixed upon.

"So they know all about Stainer," she said.

"They mentioned the Stainer case. What they know doesn't concern me. I was quite innocent. I showed you the reports. I was completely exonerated."

Laura looked at him wearily. "Perhaps this is one of the disadvantages of being a barrister's wife, and a barrister's sister. But you and Scott have lectured me so often on the 'art of advocacy' and the difference between guilt and innocence residing in the way the evidence is presented. I'm not talking about exoneration, about *your* sort of guilt and innocence. I'm talking about reality."

Melville Carr couldn't resist a smile. There were so many sorts of reality, the various artists', scientists', philosophers', theologians', politicians'. *Quot homines, tot realitates.* And it was true, no two men recognised the same reality.

"As your wife, I wonder how long this is going on. How many times you have got to be exonerated for the death of a homosexual, before you admit that there might be some speck of guilt on your part? I mean, if there's a woman and a couple of her lovers kill themselves, she gets the name of a *femme fatale*. Aren't you an *homme fatal*?"

He glanced at the whisky bottle. It had been nearly full and now it was nearly empty. There was a plate with a half-finished sandwich on the table by the window and on the table beside Laura an ash-tray full of half-finished cigarettes, violently stubbed out. Laura was, if not drunk, at least not sober. He emptied the ash-tray into the fire.

"I'm beginning to wonder if I haven't married a *coquet*,"

she said. "What makes you lead them on, Mel, and then holds you back at the last moment?"

He turned on her. "You've had too much to drink, Laura."

She grinned loosely. "So I have. And wouldn't you in my place? Nobody keeling over for love of me! Only for my ravishing and modest husband! I'm jealous. I had no idea you were so attractive. To young men, I mean."

It went on, this battle, for what seemed like hours, before Mel got Laura to bed. It was a terrible scene, made all the more terrible because the scandal had to be kept from the ears of the Brookses. Mel could imagine Mrs. Brooks in the witness box. This was the raw material for what had been some of his most successful interrogations. He trembled to think what he could make of it, either way.

And yet none of it mattered. It wasn't the main problem. Laura had let him down—just as he must have let her down earlier. But what he thought as he came downstairs, shaking with emotion, after putting her to bed, was: what the hell was the answer to this moral problem? Whom could he ask about it? Should he call Scott?

But it was no good calling Scott. He would see it not as a moral problem, but as part of the equation involving his sister and his best friend. What Mel needed was an utter stranger, discreet, courageous and inflexible. There was no one.

He went downstairs and called Queenie. This was the time of the evening promenade, during which the bitch delivered her canine messages and his master thought out his human problems; problems which, with every challenging of human motives, became more difficult to decide.

He thought of Fullbrook with his complex array of companies, Mandrake with his little photographic empire and

Calloway with a career which had only just passed its peak. Did he dare to put them in jeopardy?

He leaned on the embankment wall, letting Queenie have her run, while he looked across the unsweet Thames at the crooked dagger which the moon's reflection cast upon its waters. "What?" he said, "What's the answer?"

A man came and leant on the wall beside him. He looked across the Thames. "I don't know," he said, in a quiet voice.

Carr turned and looked at him. He saw the man in profile, a strong, rather fleshy face in middle age. "What do you know about this?" Carr asked.

"Nothing, except the certainty that there was someone here who needed me badly. I had no idea it was you, Mr. Carr."

The voice had seemed vaguely familiar. Now looking closer Carr saw that it was Dr. Anstey, but without his clerical collar. Anstey had been, until two years before, a biological chemist; then in his early forties, he had thrown up his career and taken Holy Orders. Carr, who had resumed church-going on his marriage in deference to Laura's faith, had been deeply impressed by the seriousness of Anstey's vocation, the combination of moral fervour, intellectual integrity and spiritual vision. "Could I talk to you in absolute confidence?" he asked.

"It's cold here," the priest said. "Shall we go to my room, if you don't mind the mess?"

The room was in a semi-detached Edwardian red-brick house. It was a bed-sitting room in what had once been the parlour, in a mess not because of untidiness, but because it contained too much for its space. As Anstey put a kettle

on the gas-ring for tea, Carr looked round the room, the book-lined walls, the crucifix, the divan bed. There was a sort of 'cosiness' about it, the product of a soul's contentment.

Omitting names, Carr told his story with a brevity and lucidity which he had learnt from the courts. Even so, it took a long time. "So you see," he concluded, "it isn't a simple issue of risking my own career and marriage. I can't foresee what the ultimate consequences of my actions may be."

Dr. Anstey did not answer. He remained with his head cradled on his hands, his eyes closed. He had said nothing for a long time and Carr thought that perhaps he had fallen asleep. But when he looked up at last, he was very wide awake. "We can never foresee what the ultimate consequences of our actions will be. Thank God! We can't even look back and see the ripples of our actions, good and evil, on those we have never met. That way leads to an existentialist paralysis of the will. Of course we are all members of one body; but it's arrogant for one member to take over the moral responsibilities of others. You're so concerned with the possibility, for example, that your doing what you're convinced to be right will endanger your marriage, or the fortunes of these friends of yours who are being blackmailed, that you don't see that it might make your marriage something deeper and stronger than it is at the moment; and perhaps deliver these men from the hell in which they have grown accustomed to live."

"I don't want others to suffer because of what I do."

"People will suffer whatever you do," Anstey answered. "But today we're afraid of suffering. We take tranquilisers instead, to deaden the pain from which we could learn.

You've got to think not of your rich friends who can afford to pay, but the unknown Barretts and Henrys who are the real victims."

There was something contagious about the doctor's faith, his absolute trust in divine providence. Like most people dubious about their Creator's interest in the affairs of men, Carr had been trying to assume too great a burden of responsibility. Now that he saw that his duty lay merely in doing what was right, regardless of the consequences it might have on others with an equal moral responsibility, his spiritual uncertainty vanished and with it, his perplexity about what he must do next. He must find his allies among the real victims, not those who could afford to pay.

At 9 a.m. next morning, when Laura was still in bed, Carr called Fullbrook. "I've slept on your proposals," he said. "And I shan't be coming to the club this evening. I thought it fair to warn you that I'm going ahead on my own lines. You may want to make your own arrangements."

"Oh!" It was the sort of involuntary sound which a man lets out who has been punched in the midriff. If it hadn't been for Fullbrook's heavy breathing, Carr would have thought he had rung off. Then Fullbrook said, "Carr!"

"Yes?"

"Why are you telling me this?" Carr could picture the suspicions in Fullbrook's mind. Was it a trap? Were the police tapping the wire? Were they posted to see what he would do, where would he go, in the hope of getting from his behaviour the information he had refused to give of his own free will? It was easy enough to imagine, because these were possibilities which Carr had revolved in his

mind during a largely sleepless night. There were things to be said for it. It was the one certain way of finding the blackmailers. The bigger the scandal, the greater the pressure to have it hushed up; or if it broke, the better the chance that public opinion would assure M.P.'s that they ought to pass the Wolfenden Recommendations into law. But he had decided against it. He could do as he liked with his own career, but it was unjust to jeopardise the others.

"I'm telling you, as a friend."

"I see. Well—I appreciate that. How long can you give us?"

Carr knew what a risk he was taking tipping Fullbrook off. The blackmailers, if they had any sense, would skip the country the moment they laid hands on the sizable sum which Fullbrook's syndicate would be prepared to pay. "I can give you no promise about that."

"That's ridiculous," Fullbrook said. "It's . . . it's blackmail."

"No," Carr said, "that is exactly what it is not. You've got me mixed up with the other party." And he put down the receiver.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SUSPICIONS

Lord Fullbrook was no fool. He would never have reached his position in the business world, his sixteen directorships, his many honorary posts (without salary but with

expenses) if he had been guilty of the folly of believing that people said what they meant or meant what they said. The first question he asked himself in any puzzling situation was, 'What's he getting at?' And he usually found the answer by asking a second. 'What's he stand to gain himself?' He had no objection to the other fellow getting something, provided he got more. He was, after all, a Big Man; and he accepted the principle, 'To him that hath it shall be given.'

Consequently Lord Fullbrook knew immediately that when Carr said that he was speaking 'as a friend', he was using one of those damn fool sophistries, like 'This hurts me more than it does you.' Carr meant him to take immediate action, which would give himself away as well as the blackmailers. And Fullbrook could guess why. The reference to the Stainer case had struck home deeper than he had intended. Carr hoped to use him or Mandrake or Calloway as stalking horses. He might even have the nerve later to offer to defend them for half fee 'as a friend'.

His private secretary, Pomeroy, was waiting in the study. Pomeroy always went to the office at 8.30, opened the mail and brought with him anything of importance, so that in the car driving to Fullbrook House his lordship might work on any decisions which needed to be made immediately. Pomeroy had already been waiting ten minutes. But he was a patient man, but then he was paid well to be patient. There were always his fingernails to be buffed. He was very proud of his fingernails.

Fullbrook bit his as he walked up and down trying to make up his mind what was best to do. The fact that Carr and the police had laid this trap obviously meant that they didn't know who the blackmailers were. Carr had been

quite truthful in saying that he couldn't say how long it would be before the blackmailers were arrested. It would depend entirely on how quickly he and Mandrake and Calloway acted.

And so in fact there was no immediate danger.

On the other hand there was an *ultimate* danger; and the ultimate danger could perhaps be profitably put to use. Carr had been suggesting that they should go along to the blackmailers and say, 'What will you take to give us the documents back?' That would be a very costly thing to do—if not impossible. At least it had been impossible, whenever he had tried it previously. But Melville Carr had presented him with a trump card. If one could get a message to them—through one or other of their various receiving agencies—they never used the same one twice . . . But come to think of it, there was no need to search them out. Their demands came in with depressing frequency. Just wait till the next demand and then more in sorrow than in anger warn them that the game was up; they'd overstepped themselves with Barrett and Henry and if they wanted to evade arrest, the quicker they hopped the country, the better. If they were properly scared, they'd want a lump sum quick and it would be possible to get the documents back for a small fraction of what he had already offered and been refused.

He smiled. Poor old Tiny. It was really ridiculous the state into which he had worked himself the night before. The anger he had felt against Carr a few minutes before completely vanished.

He took a cigar from his case, listened as he rolled it between his fingers, sniffed it and cut it with his gold cigar cutter. Very carefully he lit it, turning it round to get an

even coal, looked in the mirror, brushed back some hairs from his temple and went to the study. "Well, Pomeroy," he said, "has the world come to an end overnight?"

"I'm sorry, sir." Pomeroy was always puzzled by his master's heavy hyperbole. Then a smile dawned. "Oh, I see. No, not exactly. But there's something rather interesting in fish fetiliser from the Argentine . . ."

On his way into town, Melville Carr stopped off at Fulham Police Station. Detective Inspector Harris saw him straight away. "I hope this means good news, Mr. Carr."

"No such luck," Carr said. "Except that the nature of the problem is becoming slightly clearer to me. These people seem to spread their net pretty widely. I don't think we'll get any help from the rich ones. They can afford to pay but they can't afford to co-operate with the police."

"Don't we know that!" Inspector Harris offered Carr a cigarette. "And yet you can't promise a free pardon to anyone who's being blackmailed for an offence. It might be murder. You could get collusive blackmail."

"Then what we have to concentrate on is the poor man, the one who's been bled white—like Barrett and Henry. If there are any more of them. Though it doesn't seem likely that they'd drive a third person as far as that, after what's happened."

"I'm not so sure," Harris said. "You know blackmail is a migratory business. They never stay in any one place very long. They move in, milk the place dry and then skip before they're caught. Judging from the tough way they treated those other two, I shouldn't be surprised if they were cleaning up preparatory to moving on to pastures

new. The point is, have you any ideas as to who these little men are?"

"Have you been keeping your eyes on the Chequers, Inspector?"

"Why should you ask that?"

"Both Barrett and Henry used it as their pub and it has I believe a reputation . . ."

"Is there anyone you suspect there?"

"There are three people I'm rather curious about. One's a man who's supposed to be a tea-taster. He never drinks anything but tonic water."

"That sounds *queer*," Harris said with a smile, "but surely not in the technical sense."

"Maybe not. But tonic water is surely only a vehicle to convey gin into the bloodstream. A man must be very broke to drink it without the gin."

"People who're very broke, in my experience," said the inspector, "drink the gin without the tonic. Is that the only suspicious thing about him?"

Carr told him about Eddy Stone seeing the tea-taster hanging around on the other side of the street opposite the barber shop the day after Henry's death. "A strange way of passing the time, when he should have been sipping tea in Mincing Lane."

"It's a line. It's worth exploring," Harris said. "Of course, he might have slipped out for a cup of coffee for a change, mightn't he? Any idea of his name?"

Carr shook his head. "The other two are an old blind man, called P.H., and a young man called Micky, who's his sort of Guide Dog. They're inseparable, Stone says; and the old man's uncanny. He just sits there, taking everything

in. Old asdic-ears, Stone calls him. Terribly interested in what's going on around him."

"Isn't that rather a touching interest in a blind man?"

"*Touching* seems to me perhaps to be the right word. They seem to be quite well off—able to drink sherries at three shillings a glass. And yet they neither of them do any work. Unless that is, they *are* working, when they're in the Chequers."

"That's very interesting," Inspector Harris said, getting up. "Thank you very much for coming in. We'll follow up what you say." Then as he shook Carr's hand, he said, "You know what interested me most in our talk, sir?"

"No."

"You didn't mention Mortimer."

"Mortimer?"

"The car-salesman from the Cavendish Motors."

"Oh, the one they call Phip?" The inspector's suspicion made Carr rather uneasy, because it was justified. "I hadn't forgotten him, I can assure you. But I'm hoping Eddy Stone will cope with him. I've told him to."

Harris smiled. "Just so long as you hadn't forgotten, Mr. Carr. I think you'll find him more rewarding than the tea-taster."

PART FOUR

VICTIM 2c. One who perishes or suffers in health, etc., from some enterprise or pursuit voluntarily undertaken.

Oxford English Dictionary.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A CALL FOR MR. MORTIMER

When Eddy went into the Chequers, the only customer was Madge. She was sitting at her usual place at the corner of the bar with her elbow jammed against the display box of cigars. Fred was re-stocking the mineral shelves, replying desultorily to her conversation.

Normally Madge hadn't much time for Eddy, but she greeted him effusively. "Have a drink," she said, "Do I look as bad as I feel? All right, a small Dairymaid, Fred, when you've stopped fiddling with that Bitter Lemon." She caught a glimpse of her overhung features in the looking-glass between the upright wines and the inverted spirits. "God, I look a sight!" She opened her bag and started to look at herself in the mirror of her compact and dabbed furiously with her puff. "I don't often overdo it. You know, Fred. I know my limit. You've never seen me the worse, have you, Eddy? But last night, was I high!"

"It was because of Henry," Eddy said. "When did you hear?"

"I got in late last night, about seven. I'd been doing a Mandrake session and I was so tired I went back and took a bath. And I came in here and Elsa said, 'Isn't it terrible about poor, dear old Henry?' 'What about Henry?' I said, knowing nothing, me not having been in lunchtime, because of the modelling. 'Oh, didn't you know?' she said.

'I'm ever so sorry.' And then she told me, and my God, you could've knocked me down with a feather."

"The question is, who done it?" Eddy said. He lifted his glass, "Cheerio. That's what I just can't understand."

"Who did it?" Madge said. "It was those bloody leeches. My God I'd like to get hands on them."

The old blind man came in and sat at his usual place, leaning forward with his elbows on the table staring blindly blue-eyed into space while his Guide Boy went to the bar and ordered two Dock Glasses of Fino.

"They bled him white and then when he tried to get away they killed him, the rats."

"It wasn't murder," Eddy said. "At least you didn't say *that*, did you, Fred?"

"It was as good as murder," Madge said. "They knew he'd got a dickey heart. We all knew."

She had finished her whisky. "Have another," Eddy said.

"I'll have a light ale, dear," Madge wasn't a sponge and she knew the booking clerk didn't make all that money.

"Have a short," Eddy said. "I was lucky the day before yesterday, wasn't I Fred?"

"That's right," Fred wasn't listening. He was reckoning whether to get up another carton of Dry Ginger now or wait until the afternoon.

"All right, I'll have a small Haig," Madge said.

"And please give me a large tonic," said a voice behind Eddy.

It was the tea-taster. He took his tonic and went and sat in the booth next to the blind man and spread the *Financial Times* on the table. From where Eddy stood he thought what an odd contrast they made. The man who couldn't see, turning his sightless eyes this way and that, looked

like the seer and the tea-taster leaning forward over the table looked like a listener.

"But who *are* They?" Eddy said, in a soft voice. "Did Henry ever tell you?"

"He was being squeezed," Madge said, confidentially. "Because . . . of him being, well, what he was . . . you know. But he couldn't find out who they were. These letters would come—just plain business envelopes with a little address label stuck on, telling him where to put the money. It was always a different place, he said. There'd be these photographs with the message on the back. It was devilish. He bought the negative of one for two hundred pounds. And just as he was sitting back, feeling safe at last, then the print of another one even worse came along."

"And if he didn't take any notice?"

"They upped the demand by a fiver."

Phip came wearing his natty check hat as usual. Eddy hailed him and asked him what he'd have. "I'll buy my own," Phip said. "I want a short."

"Have a short," Eddy said, "I won on the horses, didn't I, Fred?"

"S'right," Fred said. "Haig?"

Phip nodded, fiddling with his pipe. He was one of those people who never get used to a pipe, always looking as if they were just learning to smoke. "Here's astonishing good health."

"Madge was just saying Henry was being squeezed," Eddy said. "I don't know what I'd do if I was squeezed. There must be some way of finding out who's doing it."

"Not if there's only one of you," Phip said. "They know what you look like and they don't turn up until you've gone away."

"But if there were two of you, then you could find out," Eddy said.

"Where does that get you?" Madge asked. "You can't go to the police. Not if you were Henry, that is. He'd been inside twelve years of his life. Twelve years! And if he went in again, he knew it'd kill him."

"I hope it never happens to me," Eddy said.

Phip patted him on the shoulder. "I shouldn't have scared you the other day," he said. "You're safe enough, I think."

"Why?"

The telephone rang and Fred went into the office to answer it.

"Because . . . "

"Because what?" Eddy persisted.

"You haven't enough to lose," Phip said. "Thanks for the drink."

He was half-way to the door, when Fred called. "Oh, Mr. Mortimer. This call's for you."

"I'm not here."

"I've said you are."

"You bloody fool," Phip muttered and went into the office and closed the door behind him.

"It's the garage again," Madge said. "He'll be for it."

"No, it isn't. It's somebody else. Heard the voice before somewhere, but I can't place it," Fred said.

Eddy looked round. The blind man was still sitting there, but Micky had left. So had the tea-taster.

Phip came out of the office, clutching his pipe. He looked dazed, as if someone had hit him between the eyes. "Bad news?" Madge called. "Have another before you go?"

Phip didn't answer. Instead, he looked round the saloon. "Be seeing you," he muttered and went out.

There was a silence in the bar. Even Fred stopped polishing the glasses.

Then a voice said in a rather high clear voice. "Tell me, please. That young man seemed rather upset." It was the blind man.

"He was, guv," Fred said.

"I thought as much," the blind man said, twirling his glass between his fingers.

Eddy saw that he was smiling.

Then the thought struck him. The voice, familiar but unidentified, that Fred had heard could have been either the tea-taster's or Micky's.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

A SLOW DRIVE ROUND THE PARK

Melville Carr looked through the window of Cavendish Motors at the board displaying the prices of cars for sale. Out of the corner of his eye he could see that though there were two desks, there was only one salesman on duty. The other was obviously out at lunch. He wasn't sitting at either of the desks, but standing beside a Rolls Phantom, with an unlit pipe in his mouth, staring moodily into space. He was a man of about forty, with a physique which, like his clothes, had once been good. Now he was bejowled, dissipated.

As Carr came in, he switched on his salesman jauntiness, but it wasn't very bright. He had a slight limp, as he came across to Carr. "Good afternoon, sir. Are you interested in a car?"

Carr grunted what might be taken as assent. "You *are* Mr. Mortimer?"

"Yes sir. Mr. Prosser's out at lunch. But I'm sure that I . . ." Usually people came in asking for Mr. Prosser. This was a pleasant change. "Did somebody recommend you?"

"Um." Carr nodded. "Would it be possible, you think, to take me out in the Rolls? Just around the Park?"

"But of course, sir," Mortimer said. "A pleasure." He went over to the office, where the telephonist clerk was seated with a view of the sales-room on one side and the garage on the other. He took his little check hat and the key of the Rolls. "Tell Mr. Prosser I've taken the Rolls out with a prospect. I'll be back."

Mortimer disappeared for a minute into a room marked GENTS and when he came back, he was looking spryer, but when they got into the car, Melville noticed that there was a pungent smell of whisky.

Mortimer was desperately anxious to sell the car. All the way to the park he was selling hard. It was years since he had met anyone who seemed such a pushover as a prospect. Carr realised with a pang of apprehension that Mortimer must see him as a possible way of paying the last blackmail demand. Carr, watching the way he handled the controls, becoming, so to speak, the soul of the car he was driving, said, "You'd have made a wonderful racing driver."

Mortimer turned on him a look of gratitude. "Not now I wouldn't. But there was a time. Before the Korean war. I think I might have been in the Mike Hawthorn-Stirling

Moss class. Now I'm just a good chauffeur-driver." He started to bring the conversation back to the car he was selling. "By the way, who was it recommended me to you. It wasn't Lord Fullbrook, I suppose?"

"No, it wasn't. Though I know him."

"I sold him that Jag of his," Mortimer said. "A lovely job. That's what I really like: a client who needs someone to interpret his needs to the manufacturer; and see they're carried out."

They were in the park now making through the welter of works at Hyde Park Corner towards the Knightsbridge barracks. "It was another friend of yours who told me to come to you," Carr said. "He suggested that we might be able to help one another."

"I don't understand." The conversation was switching lines and Mortimer realised that he was not on an express sale. "Who do you mean?"

"Eddy Stone," Carrr said. "He told me you were in a fix."

"The little sod!" Mortimer muttered.

"Can you draw in by the Serpentine?" Carr asked. "We could talk more easily."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Melville Carr. I'm a barrister and for professional reasons I'm very interested in the suicide of Jack Barrett."

"And that little tart put you on to me? I'll tear a strip off him, when I see him next. My God, I will."

Carr looked at that spoilt, over-indulged face, behind which was an enigmatic brain working in a way he could only guess at. He said nothing as they crossed the Serpentine bridge, but as they swung to the right, he said. "I could help you, too."

Mortimer swung the car off the main road on to the Lido car park. There was only one other car there, an Anglia in which a man and a young woman sat earnestly talking. As Mortimer switched off the ignition, it seemed as if a spark died in his own soul. He sat behind the wheel, a shabby defeated man in the tatters of his earlier smartness, the frayed shirt cuffs competing in reticence with the frayed coat sleeves, only the tatty check hat proclaiming smartness.

"Barrett is dead. So what?"

"You are still alive," Carr said.

Mortimer dusted the dashboard with a discoloured silk handkerchief. But he had not troubled to clean his shoes that morning. "Barrett was dotty," Mortimer said. "He thought he could make a go of being the way he was. He's well out of it." Then Mortimer's mood changed and he turned to Carr. "What the hell are you up to, Mr. Carr? I know you're not one of *them*. They never show their faces. But what do you think you're going to get out of me?"

"I don't know," Carr said, looking away from Mortimer in embarrassment. As he did so, he caught in the driving mirror the image of something he had noticed earlier. There was someone else in the car park, a hardy young man sitting astride a Lambretta, oblivious of the February east wind. "I thought from what Eddy Stone said . . . "

"I'll bash his face in."

Carr put his hand on Mortimer's thigh and gripped it hard. "Don't be a fool. They've sent another demand, haven't they? What's it for?"

"It's no good," Mortimer bent his head over the wheel. "It's no bloody good, I tell you. Whatever you pay them. You don't realise the years this has gone on." He started to cry. "They beat . . . beat . . . beat you down and down and

down. I've had it. I've had it." He lifted up his head, his face streaked with tears.

"I'm terribly sorry," Carr said. "But you *mustn't* give up." And he tried to console—how he exactly had his hands and arms he didn't know, when he looked up and saw the chap from the Lambretta peering through the off-side window, clutching the lapel of his windcheater.

"What the hell . . .?" He thrust open the door and walked round the back of the Rolls. The young man was walking back towards his Lambretta. "Hey you!" Carr shouted.

The young man took no notice.

"You there! Stop!" he shouted.

Coming from the direction of Lancaster Gate was a constable.

The young man stopped and turned round. He was standing on tiptoe and shrugging his shoulders like a boxer limbering up. "Was you talkin' to me?"

"What were you doing peering into that car?"

"Lookin'." The young man looked him down and up again.

"Why?"

"Thought you was two blokes I knew. You wasn't." He half-turned.

"What have you got in the lapel of that windcheater?"

"A hole."

"Let me see."

"It ain't for the likes of you, mister," the young man said. "An' don't try and lay your hands on me. I'll call that rozzer and give you in charge. You'd like that, you and your boy friend."

Carr said nothing, just stood watching the constable move on, as the young man went back to his Lambretta,

kicked it into life and with that V sign which Winston Churchill raised from vulgarity to victory, he drove off.

Carr walked back to the Rolls. "Have you seen that gorilla before?"

"I didn't notice him," Mortimer said. "You suddenly rushed out. I didn't see what was going on."

The smell of whisky on his breath persuaded Carr that Mortimer was probably telling the truth. "How much do they want this time?"

"How much?" Mortimer repeated it to give him time to think. They had been tapping him for that steady fiver a week, crippling after he'd had his tax deducted PAYE. And now this voice had demanded £20. That was why he was going to run for it. Go to see Aunt Meg in Heysham. "Fifty. Where'd they think I can rustle fifty from?"

"What are you going to do then?"

"A moonlight flit, like Barrett," Mortimer said. "At least I haven't dipped into the till, as he did. I've done it before, but they caught up with me. Maybe this time I'll be lucky."

"What if I staked you?" Carr asked. "Gave you the money? Would you tell me where you have to deliver it?"

Mortimer looked at him suspiciously. "What's the use? They'll only come back for more."

"What have they got on you?"

"Five letters. I wrote them to this little German swine. I must have been mad. I thought it was the genuine thing. But he was like the rest. Only better at pretending."

Carr watched Mortimer curiously. There must have been a time when like Barrett, Mortimer had thought of 'making a go the way he was'. Now even the possibility of indulging

it as a sordid little vice was ruled out. "I'm sure I can help you, if you'll help me," Carr said.

Mortimer shook his head. "Mr. X. Play it the police way. I can't do it. Slightest smell and I'd be out of the old man's will."

"Not if we bought back the letters," Carr said. "My hunch is they're trying to collect and lay low until the stink over Barrett and Henry dies down. I think they'd be anxious to settle for a lump sum down."

"And where do I get that from?"

"Me."

Suspicion flared in Mortimer's eyes again. "And what do you get out of it? You're not doing this for my beautiful eyes."

Carr pulled out his wallet and extracted the photograph of him and Barrett. He handed it to Mortimer. "I want the neg of this."

Mortimer looked at it and whistled. "They screwing you too?"

"If they were, I could contact them. That's why I'm prepared to buy your letters back for you; in return for your telling me where you've got to deliver that fifty pounds."

Mortimer pulled out an empty pack of cigarettes and looked at it. Carr gave him one from his case. Mortimer lit it and took a deep draught of smoke into his lungs and slowly expelled it. Carr looked in the mirror to see if the gorilla on the Lambretta had come back. He couldn't see him. "And if it goes wrong they'll have it in for me," Mortimer said.

"You were chucking your job tonight. If it fails, you can still chuck your job any time you want."

Mortimer nodded. "Fair enough."

"You'd be no worse off."

"What about the fifty?" It was perfectly true. He could pay over the £20 they demanded and there would still be £30 to tide him over till he got another job.

"We can pick that up from my office any time."

Mortimer shook Carr by the hand. "It's a deal," he said. "I'm supposed to chuck the money into the litterbin in Little Conduit Street at seven-thirty tomorrow morning."

"That's Bloomsbury, isn't it?" Carr said. "Let's drive to my office via Little Conduit Street. But we'd better be jolly sure that chap on the Lambretta doesn't follow us."

'At last,' he thought, 'at last we've got something to go on.' And the next moment, he cursed himself. He had never thought to take the number-plate of the Lambretta. If he'd only done that, he would have had a chance of checking on it before tomorrow morning.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE WHITEWASH TREATMENT

There was no sign of the Lambretta, for the good reason that the tough young man, who rejoiced in the name of Sligger Swiney, had better things to do. He lived and worked in a tumble-down building which had once been the watchman's house and store-room of a builder's yard in Paddington. Downstairs was his dark-room and workshop, and above a bed-sitting room with a primitive kitchen and

bath. It was a peculiarly lonely hang-out, but it suited him; a lone wolf's den. He could have afforded better, but he didn't want it.

He parked the Lambretta in the shed and went in to the workroom, which was equipped with the usual furniture of the street photographer, the light trestle tables, the cabinet for filing negatives and prints, the cheap stationery, the mounts and print clips, the adhesive tape. He picked up the receiver and dialled a number.

When he heard the voice at the other end, he said, " 'lo, Jo. Can you talk? Fine. Thought you'd like ter know. Mortimer took Carr a little drive in the park. I got a pretty blick of them by the Serpentine. Sort of twin to the Barrett one. That's if it comes out. Yes, he did see me. Got out an' asked what the hell I was doing. Carr, I mean, did. Mortimer was blubbing . . . No, I said I'd call a cop! That scared him. I was frightened 'e might try an' smash the camera. But he just walked back to the car."

He listened to Jo's cautions. Jo was a scared-pants. Then he said, "I got an idea. Why don't we sell M.C. the Barrett neg? Not on the H.P. Cash down. What d'you say? I think 'e'd be interested. Or we could *make* 'im interested."

Jo debated it for a little while and then agreed.

"Okey dokey, Jo. Glad you like the idea," Sligger said. "Thought we might try the whitewash trick we played on the old bish."

Jo laughed. "Don't let anyone catch you, though. Good-luck." Sligger was surprised. It was the nearest that master mind had ever come to showing any concern for him. He was rather touched.

His simple delinquent mind enjoyed the mechanics of a baiting operation. Evacuated in 1939, at the age of six,

devoted to a drunken mother who hadn't yet made up her mind to ditch him, Sligger had been revenging himself ever since, for the final betrayal, she went off with the Pole. He was against the established, the secure, the traditional in every form. It was his crusade to bring that world to an end; and what gave it point was that at one time in his life, when he was twelve years old, he had met a man whom he had really admired—worshipped would perhaps be a more accurate word. Mr. Edmonds had been the master of his scout troop. He had taught him the lore of scouting, the loyalties, the love of nature, the excitement of learning to do things for oneself. He had awakened in him the flame of the spirit, the idealism of which he had been starved until then. There was no high enterprise he would not have undertaken for Mr. Edmonds. He lived on the peaks. Every moment had a luminous quality, when Mr. Edmonds was there, even on the foggiest, dreariest day. For nearly a year he lived in an adolescent heaven. And then in that Deptford parlour, on Corpus Christi Sunday, over tea and cakes and sardine sandwiches, his idol fell, talking of bodily urges, the loves of Plato.

Sligger got his revenge for that. Mr. Edmonds did four years. But the hatred which Sligger had felt for the establishment in general became focused on inversion, the supreme hypocrisy of the love which had raised him highest and let him down the lowest. In his bitter negatives he felt that he was fighting a positive crusade against evil. He kept a punch-ball in a corner of his workshop. He didn't smoke. He didn't drink. He trained. He ran along the streets of Paddington, he trotted beside the Regent's Park Canal in shorts in the early morning. He was pure; as pure as undiluted vitriol.

As he rode the Lambretta towards Chiswick, with the brushes and the whitewash on the carrier behind him, he thought of the daubing possibilities.

MELVILLE CARR QUEENS' COUNSEL

That was very nice, very subtle. But THEY weren't very subtle. They might not get it. He had to think of something more obvious than an apostrophe after the S. What about

MELVILLE CARR QUEER COUNSEL?

That was nearer the mark. But Sligger didn't decide one way or the other until he got to a job. He was an inspirational artist. Unlike Jo. She made up her mind from the beginning and stuck to it.

Mortimer drove down Little Conduit Street. It was terraced either side with early Victorian houses, which had been turned into hotels. "Drive slowly," Carr said.

On the near side of the litter-bin was the Hotel Bolsover and on the opposite side was the Hyperborean Hotel, under Entirely New Management. "Have you ever noticed that they never say when they are *partially* under new management?" Carr remarked.

Mortimer laughed. "They'd have to keep the board up permanently; if they did."

When he finally said good-bye to Carr after having received the fifty pounds, Mortimer said, "I'm only a car salesman, but can I shake your hand, Mr. Carr?"

Melville Carr took his hand. "We can get out of this. I know we can. I know we can."

"But how do you plan to do it?" Mortimer asked, anxiously.

"I don't know," Carr said. "Don't worry, my dear chap. We'll get you right. But for goodness sake, don't drink too much."

Laura looked at the pastel. It was good. It was of a close-up of a little boy, a sort of Indian boy with a tea-cosy on his head. In the distant background a tremendously wide landscape which was the world. The boy was smiling. It was the first time David had ever drawn a person smiling.

"I think that's lovely, David," Laura said. "I'd like to have it when you've finished it." It had the charm and freshness of a child's vision.

Then Dr. Meyer, the senior psychiatrist, came up. He was a terrifyingly learned little man with a hunched back, bifocal lenses and an imperfect command of English. "Goot," he said, taking up the drawing. "Zat is ferry goot, Dah-veed. Ferry goot."

David pushed it to one side. "It's finished," he said, and started to work on another sheet. The fact that the doctor had touched it and praised it was enough to spoil the picture for him. There was a long complicated file about what was wrong with David. Dr. Meyer had given it to Laura to read, because, he said, she had a rare psychiatric flair. But it meant no more to her than the doctor's own jargon. To Laura, David's only trouble was that he was a thin slice of artistic temperament sandwiched between a stodgy elder sister and an equally stodgy younger brother. His paintings and drawings were not significant as the 'externalisation of his unconscious fantasies and fears' but as the fulfilment of an artistic impulse denied in his home.

Miss Chandler, the secretary, came in. "Mr. Carr wants

to speak to you. Would you like to take it in my office?"

Laura wondered what Mel wanted. He had never called her at the Clinic before. A message to Mrs. Brooks had always sufficed. She picked up the phone. "Is anything wrong, darling?"

"No," he said. "In fact I think things are going righter than they were. But I want to see you and explain. Could I pick you up in about twenty minutes time at the Clinic?"

Laura hesitated for a moment. She was not paid for her work at the Clinic, but she considered it a point of honour to keep the full hours and she was not due to leave until the Clinic was finished, perhaps three quarters of an hour later. But Mel would not have called her if he hadn't got his reasons. "Yes, do that."

There are secret places in the mind to which most of us have no access. When Carr explained to Laura his intention of spending the night at the Hotel Bolsover, where he had secured a front room from which he could watch the litter-bin in Little Conduit Street, she immediately said, "But why *you*? Why don't you get the police to watch?"

"Because," he answered, "because I want to make contact with them myself. I've an idea that there's more than one of them; and if we just get the one who picks up the money, it may very well not be the principal; and he might not give the principal away."

"Wouldn't Inspector Harris appreciate that too?"

"He might. There's no saying. But to tell you the truth, I rather wanted to get hold of that negative first. There's no telling what they might do with it. I've got to trust Harris's discretion. But if one of them's arrested and the other

knows that I'm responsible, he might mail copies of it here, there and everywhere, just for spite."

Carr did not add, because he did not even admit to himself, the possibility that if the Barrett negative was destroyed, he might find some way of keeping himself out of the case. There had to be a victim. But couldn't Henry be used? Or somebody else?

"Perhaps you're right," Laura said uncertainly. "I don't know. I don't know anything for certain any more."

"I think you ought to go away," he said. "Clear out while this business is on."

"That is one thing on which I've no uncertainty," she answered. "Scott's been on to me to the same effect. And the pair of you are a couple of fuddy-duddies. This is the one time you've really needed me and you expect me to run away. I've never heard such old-fashioned nonsense."

He clasped her hand. "Thank you for that, my love."

"Thank you for nothing," she answered. "The idea that you should even think I'd go makes me very angry."

"Shall I drop you at the front?" he asked. The garage was at the back of the house and there was a covered way from it along the garden wall.

"Of course not," she said, "but aren't you going to take the car to the hotel?"

"I shall arrive in a taxi from Victoria," he said, "Mr. Martin Coleman, catching the eleven-five to Manchester tomorrow morning."

Laura laughed. "I think you're an absolute child; you're really enjoying this. Have you hired a beard from Clarkson's? Or will you just rely on dark glasses?"

"It's an idea," he said driving into the mews. "Hullo. I didn't leave that blind up." The garage had a rolling metal

blind which was raised. Its disadvantage was that it was secured on the inside. It couldn't be fastened on the mews side. "It's those kids again."

He drove into the garage and hanging up on the end wall as usual was the second spare wheel, which he took when touring abroad. Something was written on it in white, but the lettering was too small for him to read it. "Can you read that?" he asked.

Laura got out and switched on the light and went over to look at it, while Mel went to pull the blind down.

The blind came down with a clatter and almost in the same breath Laura and Mel said, "My God!" and in the next, "Look at this!"

On the inside of the blind in large crude letters was daubed

CARR'S QUEER

And on the spare tyre in small careful letters was painted

QUEER'S CAR

Laura and Mel looked at one another. She was white and he was shaking.

"It's started," Laura said.

Melville looked round the garage to see if there were any more *facetiae*. Then he went to the wall-tap and picked up the sponge Brooks used for washing the car. "Pray God the Brookses didn't see it," he said as he started to wash the blind.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

EVENING FALLS

"And so, gentlemen," Lord Fullbrook concluded, as if Mandrake and Calloway were on one of his boards of directors, "If you agree with my analysis of the situation, the best thing, in fact the only thing, we can do is to sit back and to relax, until we are approached again and then warn our friends to get the hell out as fast as they can."

" 'Friends' is an odd word to use," Calloway observed.

"Your analysis, my dear Cecil, is based upon the assumption that Carr is you and his mind works as yours does," Mandrake said. "Have you any evidence of that?"

"Carr isn't a fool."

"But there are lots of different ways not to be a fool."

"Anyway, Teddy," Calloway said, "Cecil is perfectly right in saying there isn't anything we can do until they approach us again. I'm a great believer in accepting the inevitable as if it was desirable."

"But is it the inevitable?" Mandrake answered. "I've never put it into words until now, because I've been accepting the inevitable as being tolerable. But have you ever asked yourself the question? 'Is it a coincidence that the three of us, who have a certain weakness in common, should all be receiving demands from the same "firm"?' Or have we more than this weakness in common? I don't think it is a coincidence. I think that we must all know this

'person'. And we might be able to discover who he was if we found out what common acquaintances we had and then eliminated those whom we could absolutely trust."

"I'm sure you are right," Lord Fullbrook said. "Up to a certain point. I've thought of this approach dozens of times. I don't think we know the 'person'. I know we cast our nets pretty wide, but I don't think I at any rate know anyone in that line of business. No, it seems to me much more likely that our names have been given by someone paying in kind, instead of cash. And I've never chosen to take it further than that."

"But who?" Mandrake said.

"That's why I have never mentioned it," Lord Fullbrook said. "I know it isn't me, but you don't."

"My God!" Mandrake said. "I don't like the implication of that, Fullbrook, I suggest you withdraw it."

"I'm not suggesting that it is either of you," Fullbrook answered. "But you see where Mandrake's line of inquiry could lead us. No one, except a bank manager and the tax gatherer, really knows another man's financial position."

"I think we can rule one another out, you know," Mandrake said. "I was thinking that we might find in our seedier acquaintances a lowest common factor."

"I have also thought of that," remarked Lord Fullbrook. "But supposing that we found this L.C.F., as you call it, where does it get us? Why should the principals betray themselves personally to someone who is paying in names instead of notes? I should have thought there was an even greater need for discretion in that case."

Calloway looked at his watch. It was time to go to the theatre. Dorian would be already waiting. "And so we're back where we started."

But of course they weren't. The seeds of suspicion sown between them were already sprouting. Was Mandrake's suggestion an elaborate bluff? Had Fullbrook refuted it, because he was the man? Or was Calloway, who pleaded the inevitable as desirable, the guilty man?

After he left, Mandrake rang the bell and Charles brought another round of drinks. While they were being brought, Mandrake said, "You know Dorian, Tiny's yearning Urning?"

Fullbrook nodded.

"Have you ever thought it might be him?"

Charles brought the drinks and carried away the money on the silver platter.

"Or," said Fullbrook, his gaze following the sexagenarian club-waiter as he minced away, "it might be Charles."

At about the same time, P.H. was sitting with Micky in their usual booth in the Chequers, when with his rare humour P.H. sniffed and said, "Fee, fi, fo fum. I smell the breath of a car-sales man." And, sure enough, in walked Phip Mortimer. "'Evening Fred. 'Evening Madge. 'Evening Elsa. A pint of the customary in a tankard, please."

"What's up?" Fred asked. "Sold a Bentley? Or an Aunt died?"

"Something's happened to *him*," P.H. said. "Wonder what it is, Micky?"

Micky got up and went to the bar.

"Not a sale," Mortimer said. "But a prospect. The most astonishing good health! Have a drink, Madge?"

Madge had been slating her drinks on the strength of the

cheque she would get from Mandrake later in the week.
"You sure you can manage it?"

"If I can't manage that, I can't manage to keep body and soul together," Mortimer said, "which to be frank I'm not always sure I can."

"And I was thinking you'd had bad news," Madge said.

Mortimer looked puzzled.

"When you got that call this morning."

"Oh, that. I'd forgotten all about it. That was this morning. Extraordinary, isn't it? I mean the way things change?"

"When they get so bad, they've got to change for the better," Micky said. He was standing behind Mortimer and Mortimer turned and looked at him. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"No offence meant," Micky said.

"I wasn't talking to you," Mortimer said, "I was talking to my friend here. I resent your butting in."

"Micky! Micky!" P.H. said, like calling a dog.

"Go on!" jeered Mortimer. "Back to yer master."

Micky lost his temper. "D'you want to make something of this?" He trust out his jaw.

"Micky!"

Micky turned away and went back to the booth.

Mortimer laughed. "Now he's got the squeeze on *him*!"

"You must've been drinking all afternoon," Madge said.

"You're high, Phip."

"High!" His mood changed. "I'm less than the dust. Less than the dust beneath your chariot wheels. That's poetry. Or is it the Bible? Can't remember. 'Strordinary thing, can't rememory."

He lurched back against a stranger. "Fearfully sorry, ole

man," he said. "I've had a major operashun, had it this afternoon."

"You better have my stool then," the stranger said. "You've recovered jolly well. What was it for?" He winked at Madge and Fred.

"My dirty secret," Phip said. "I had it removed. Have you ever had a dirty secret?"

"Lots," said the stranger, winking hugely.

"Then you know how painful they are," Phip said.

"I knew he was high," Madge whispered to Elsa. "When he bought me a drink, I knew he was high."

"So you see why I hated that Irish bashtard butting in," He looked across towards the booth. P.H. and the young man had left. "The Battle of the Boyne!" Phip said. "Somebody's won it! Who?"

The stranger, whose name was Bridie, was a real pal to Phip. He made him eat something. He kept his alcoholic consumption down by taking him to a booth. He prevented an awkward scene in the Chequers. And finally, when Phip was getting to the sleepy stage, the stranger got the address of Phip's digs from Madge and took him back to bed.

"Talk about good Samaritans!" said Madge.

Fred laughed. "Talk about unchoosy types. The moment that Bridie came in, he saw what Phip was. And he didn't care. He was out to get him, drunk or sober. God, they make me sick! I don't know what you see in them, Madge, honest I don't."

At this moment, Sergeant Bridie, having put Mortimer to bed and seen him pass into the oblivion of alcohol, was going through his pockets. He was looking for some mes-

sage in a cheap envelope with a stuck-on address. But all he found was a smaller, better quality envelope, containing twenty one-pound notes. On the back of one of them he noticed was written 'Melville Carr'. He also found another twenty-seven pound notes in the hip pocket of Mortimer's trousers. As he put the wad back, Bridie muttered. "I wonder whose side *he's* on?"

CHAPTER THIRTY

LAMBRETTA XX75821

The Hotel Bolsover consisted of three terraced houses which had been knocked into one. There was 'central heating and constant hot running water'. How true this was Melville Carr found during the night. The hot water tap dripped because of a faulty washer. The central heating clanked and groaned like a gang of prisoners in a penitentiary trying to work out some code intelligible to them but not their jailers.

There were also Phomepillo mattresses, indiscriminately bouncy affairs, which did not sag less at the sides than in the centre. Bouncing all night long and awakened at five by the clanking pipes which were going to give him a hot bath, if he lived long enough to take it, Melville Carr did not sleep well. At five-thirty, the man in the room to his left began to gargle, and before he had finished, the couple in the room to his right resumed the activity which had been audible as he fell asleep. At six-fifteen he rose to take the

bath whose preparation had woken him an hour and a quarter before. It was tepid. He shaved and dressed.

He had ordered tea for seven o'clock. Till it arrived, he tried to work. A maid brought him his tea. She came from the West Indies, she told him, as if to excuse the coldness of the tea. In her rugged way, she was rather sweet, like an unfinished Epstein. But it did not make the tea any hotter.

The milkman came down the street. He had a little electrically driven van, which moved when he clasped a lever. When he arrived opposite the window, he disappeared down a basement and did not appear for a long time. When he did, a girl appeared at the area railings and blew him a kiss.

The time came and passed when Mortimer should have delivered the money to the litter-bin. There was no sign of him. He had probably run away, Carr thought, frightened at the price he might have to pay for freedom from blackmail.

Carr speculated whether he himself should place a phony envelope to be picked up, but decided against it. The blackmailer would probably be watching from some vantage point to see Mortimer post his money in the bin; perhaps even, he was staying in the Hyperborean Hotel, or the Bolsover.

Then Mortimer appeared at the end of the street, the patent victim of a raging hangover, a man walking like a tree.

Carr jumped up and ran down the stairs to the hall. He reached it in time to see Mortimer produce an envelope and throw it in the litter bin. Mortimer looked round, saw Carr but took no notice, and then walked on.

There was a basket chair in the hall, in which it was pos-

sible to sit and keep the litter-bin under observation. Carr bought an *Express*, a *Telegraph* and a *Herald* and took up position.

He had not long to wait. Not four minutes had passed before the young man on the Lambretta rode up.

Carr jumped to his feet. He had miscalculated. He had visualised the blackmailer either walking or driving a car which he would have to leave in order to pick up the envelope. He pulled open the door and to the surprise of the porter, who cried, "Anything wrong, sir?" dashed down and caught the young man's wrist.

Carr saw the right hand clench to a fist, but sitting on the saddle of a Lambretta isn't the best position from which to start a fight.

"So it's you again!" the young man said. "Aren't you gettin' nosey?"

With his left hand Carr snatched the envelope. "Not nosey," he said. "Just determined to get value for money."

"That ain't yours. Give it back. It's mine, see." Swiney made a grab, but Carr stepped back.

"It is mine," Carr said. "I took the precaution to sign my name on the back of one of the notes before I handed them to Mr. Mortimer. If you dispute the fact, we can easily go to the police station for them to decide."

"Don't you try to be too clever, Mister," Swiney said. "You'll pay for this."

"I'm perfectly prepared to pay," Carr said. "But not for this. If you name a reasonable sum, I will buy from you—or rather from your boss, because I can't believe that you have the intelligence even to run a shabby little racket like this—but I'll buy from your boss the five letters of Mr.

Mortimer's, which you still hold and the original negative of that photograph you sent to Barrett."

"Oh you are, are you?" Swiney's command of invective was poor. "So you're making the terms, eh?"

"Yes," said Carr. "I am making the terms. And considering what your deserts are, they are extremely generous terms. Now run along and tell your boss that he'd better make up his mind quick, for your sake."

"Wot's the hurry, Mister?"

"Because I've got the number of this horrible little runabout of yours; and it's only a matter of hours before I find a great deal more about you. I'm rather different from your other customers, you know. I'm a bully. I like hurting people. I don't show it to most people. So when I meet a little gorilla like you, who deserves everything I can give him, I really let myself go. Do you see? If you don't want your bottom kicked through your fly-buttons, you'd better scram."

He turned and walked up the steps of the hotel. The porter held the door open, with his eyes wide in admiration. "I haven't heard language like that, sir," he said. "Not since I was square-bashing."

Carr wrote down the number of the Lambretta. "You ever seen that thug before?"

"Not that I remember."

"I don't suppose you'll see him again," Carr said, producing his card and half a crown. "But if you do, give me a ring, will you?"

The porter looked at the card. "I thought I recognised the face, sir. You know you didn't ought to have signed the register the way you did."

"I'll sign it in my own way now, if you want," Carr said. "The reason for the incognito is over."

The porter was flattered to be in something that might be in the newspapers. "But I don't want to give evidence, mind you, sir."

"You won't have to, but you might get my home number now, will you?" Carr said.

Laura answered sleepily. "Oh, hallo darling, you woke me up."

"You don't realise how lucky you are," Mel said. "If you lived in this hotel, you'd feel it was lunchtime. I just rang to say that I'd made contact. I *think* it's going to be all right. It doesn't make sense yet. I spoke to this cretin—it was the one I saw in the park yesterday—but he's only the office boy. I can't make sense of what the boss is up to."

"Remember, ducky, the best method of defence is attack," Laura said. "Be your bloodiest. I know how devastating that can be."

"You don't, my lovely one. You wouldn't say that, if you'd seen me in action. Anyway, go off to sleep. I'm for the porridge and kedgeree."

"I didn't know you liked kedgeree. You never told me."

"I don't," Mel said, "but it's better than boiled Australian eggs."

He was at the office at 8.30 a.m. The char-woman let him in. He sat in his room alone for the first time in his life. It was rather wonderful to be in one's world before it woke up. And he had spoken quite truly to that thug. He had a streak of cruelty in him, which he normally kept in check. But now he felt that he had been given licence to unleash it.

He telephoned the A.A. The Lambretta number was prefixed by the letters XX. It was a London index.

Miss Slingsbee was embarrassed to find that he had arrived before her. She felt that she had fallen down on her job. "Get County Hall," he said. "Say it's urgent that they should trace this number. I want to know the name of the owner and the address."

"You'll be in court, though. Should I send a message by Mr. Patterson?"

"Do that, yes." He tried to think what benefit he might get from putting a private detective agency on to investigating the set-up. It wasn't worth it. These agencies took a couple of days before they really got going and this was already beginning to reach its climax. "Get me Inspector Harris, will you?"

He looked at his morning's brief. He had not read it thoroughly. He made a pencil mark under a key passage which he had missed the night before, because he had been thinking of this blackmail business.

Harris came through on the line. "Good-morning, Mr. Carr. What can we do to help you this morning?"

"I'm not sure that there's anything," Carr said, "I'm just sounding an alert. I've made contact with a subordinate. But I can't say very much more than that. Have you found out anything more your end?"

"We've found a little," the inspector said. "For example the owner of the Lambretta XX75821 is Patrick Gordon Swiney. He's the son of Madeline Swiney and a father unknown, born in Bethnal Green 1933. Evacuated in 1939. Abandoned 1941. Adopted in the same year by the people he was staying with. Sent to an approved school at the age of twelve. Quite a list of petty offences, you know, the

usual evacuation casualty. But we've nothing on him since 1956. He lives in an old builders' yard off the Harrow Road. And *apparently* earns his living as a street photographer. Which would fit in very well."

"And if you could search his place, you'd probably find all the evidence you wanted."

"Perhaps. But there's no justification for a search warrant —yet. The point is, if he's up to any funny business, he'll give himself away soon enough. He's far more use to us at large, than if we pulled him in."

That was perfectly true. And what was equally true was that Carr would have to call the police in, if he was buying Mortimer's letters and the Barrett photograph back. He was at the mercy of the police and the Director of Public Prosecutions. "If Swiney calls me, then I'll let you know straight away, Inspector."

"And if we find any other way round, I'll let you know, sir."

"What do you mean by that?" Carr asked.

"I think it would be better not to say," the Inspector said, "Probably I am wrong anyway."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

Eddy looked in as he passed Cavendish Motors. Phip did not notice him. He was talking to a man and woman, prospective customers, with that abstracted intensity of car

salesmen, trying to remember if they have covered all the points. He was very bad on the family car. If he was talking to a true car-lover, he was completely at ease.

Eddy passed the turning to Henry's shop. The place was closed, the blinds drawn. Poor old Henry. Eddy wondered if he had any next of kin. He never spoke about anyone. But then no one did in the Chequers, except Madge and Phip, and with them it was a sort of boasting.

Suddenly Eddy stopped. He saw the tea-taster and another chap standing together pretending to look at the notices in a newsagent's display board.

Then P.H. and his guide boy came out, P.H. stuffing something in his pocket.

"Excuse me, sir," said the tea-taster. "I wonder if you would mind coming along to the station to answer some questions."

Micky looked wildly round, obviously calculating the chances of getting away; and then he looked at the blind man, whom he couldn't abandon.

"The station! I don't understand. Who are you?"

"We're police officers," said the tea-taster. "It would be better to come quietly."

P.H. looked blue-eyed into the space between the two plain clothes men. "What are you talking about?" he asked, leaving a gap between each word, as if he was talking to some moron.

"I'm sure you'll be able to clear it all up at the station," said the 'tea-tasting' plain-clothes man, whose name was Hoey. "It's just some information we've been given." He took the letters which the blind man was trying to dispose of from his inside jacket pocket. "In fact, I'm sure this'll clear it all up. One way or the other."

"You give those back," Micky said. "Let me see your cards. You got no right."

The 'tea-taster' produced his card. "You needn't worry, sonny. I'm not going to let you out of sight of these letters. You won't lose them, because I won't lose *you*. I'm far more interested in you than I am in them."

"What's the charge?" the blind man said. "This is the most monstrous thing I've ever heard of."

"There's no charge," Hoey said facetiously, hailing a taxi. "It's all free."

"This is Eddy Stone speaking. Yes, I know Mr. Carr is in court. Will you tell him I was wrong. Can you write this down. Say, 'The tea-taster was a copper; and he's arrested the blind man and Micky.' Yes, the blind man and Micky. Say I'm sorry I got it wrong. I didn't realise."

"You haven't done badly this post, Mr. Hews," said Inspector Harris. "Three pounds from Miss Twitchett of Ross-on-Wye for maintaining a Hungarian refugee child for a month. Seven and sixpence for helping to buy an arterio-sclerotic clergyman a transistor radio set. Five guineas towards teaching Braille to blind Siamese twins. Twenty pounds for the anti-myxamatosis league. You clearly do a lot of charity work."

"Oh, I do," P.H. said. "Thanks to my secretary. When one is incapacitated, one has a special sympathy."

"And charity begins at home," said Harris.

"It must," said Mr. Hews. "How could we benefit others if we didn't keep body and soul together? But I can assure

you that after the deduction of our bare living expenses, all the money goes to the needy."

"I'm afraid that I have to charge you with obtaining money under false pretences," Inspector Harris said. "I don't like it, Mr. Hews, because you're blind. But you know perfectly well that there are institutions for the blind, specially to look after people like you. Yet you've chosen to corrupt this young man, rather than use them. I'm afraid I have no sympathy with you."

"He didn't corrupt me," Micky said, "It isn't fair. I came voluntary."

"All right, you came voluntary," Harris answered. "It won't reduce his sentence. It'll increase yours. What about the blackmail racket?"

"We've nothing to do with the blackmail racket," Micky said.

"I demand to see my lawyer," Hews said. "Are you charging us with blackmail now?"

"I'm charging you with false pretences. But I think you know about this blackmail business. So I'm giving you the chance of an 'out'. Don't take it. Call your lawyer. I don't mind."

Sergeant Hoey, the tea-taster, had faded into the obscurity which was his role. Bridie had been present at the interview. "Will you call Mr. Hew's lawyer?" asked Harris. "If he has one."

"It's outrageous. Are we in Soviet Russia?" asked P.H.

"You mean Barrett and Henry?" Micky asked. He was scared.

"Of course I mean Barrett and Henry. They were black-

mailed to death. I don't say you did it. But you know who did."

"We didn't." Micky said.

"Please, Micky," Mr. Hews said. "This is a very important thing. You may try to prefer the charges against us. I think it would be very unwise. Because any jury—and I would insist on being tried by jury—would certainly acquit us. I was a barrister, before my optic nerves gave out. A rather good one. And what I have tried to do, since I lost my sight, is to support myself and my good friend here without demands on the State or charity by bringing to the notice of the public other people equally needing help. But there is nothing I hate more than blackmail."

"But you know who was being blackmailed in the Chequers?"

"I know who was *being* blackmailed, yes. I've developed very sharp ears. But I don't think there is a blackmailer in the pub. You've got to look somewhere else."

The inter-office phone clicked. Harris depressed the key. "Mr. Carr would like to speak to you sir."

"One moment," Harris said. He nodded to the sergeant to take the two men away. Then as the door closed, he said, "Put him on."

"Is that Inspector Harris?" came a voice, as he picked up the receiver. "I have Mr. Carr for you."

Then Carr's voice. "Harris? Carr here. It's happened. Now listen . . ."

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A USE FOR HISTORY

Making his way from Charing Cross Road into the passage, Carr was moving against the rush-hour stream, making for the underground and the bus-stops. A few of the office girls were chattering, but for the most part men and women were silent, making resolutely for the warmth of home. Outside the theatre a queue was standing muffled up or squatting on folding wooden stools reading newspapers, waiting for the Gallery ticket office to open.

The instructions had underlined the time, 5.25, but Carr was early. He wanted to explore the ground. A man was examining the books on the open display shelf of Doe's. He might be a prospective purchaser or a plain-clothes man.

Carr felt his inside jacket pocket. The envelope containing the notes was there. They were a consecutive run, the numbers of which were lodged with the bank. That was safer than marking, Harris said. Carr had that empty feeling in the pit of his stomach, which he still experienced each time he went into court on an important case.

He opened the door and went in. There was a young woman sitting at a table at the back of the shop, stamping letters. She looked up. She had a broad, high brow, a strong face that could have been beautiful, if it hadn't been for the heavy spectacles and for the severity of her expression, like a schoolmistress in a reform school or a wardress in a concentration camp.

"Is there anything particular you want?" she asked.

Her voice was surprisingly authoritative; more the sort of voice you would expect from the chairwoman of a Conservative Women's Association than from a second-hand bookshop assistant. But then the number of young women of good birth who wanted 'something to do with literature' was so much greater than Fleet Street, the B.B.C. and publishers could absorb, that even the slums of literature were becoming fashionable.

"I just want to browse," Carr said. The shelves were labelled Fiction, Poetry, Drama. It would be easy to find what he wanted.

"Please do," said the woman and went on stamping envelopes. She was obviously sending out catalogues.

At the back of the shop there was a sort of snuggery with a glass panel in the upper part of the door. Through it, Carr saw a man with a small walrus moustache and a spotted bow tie, presumably Mr. Doe. He was bent over a table and seemed to be repairing the spine of a book.

The History was arranged in sub-sections; Ancient, Ecclesiastical, English, European, Military, World. The Military was on the shelves nearest the floor. He saw The History of the World War, 1914–18 in six volumes. He glanced towards the snuggery. Mr. Doe was holding the book, which was bound in calf, and making an incision in one of the boards with a pocket knife. The woman was screened from him by the History shelves. But he found a gap between the top of two books and the shelf above. She had stopped putting on stamps and was sitting very still, perhaps sunk in thought, perhaps intently listening. He could not be sure.

He knelt down and withdrew Volume V of the History

of the World War. In the flap at the back, intended for campaign maps, there was an envelope.

Carr had taken it out when he heard the scrape of a chair being pushed back. The woman walked across to the snuggery and opened the door. "I'm just going to the post, Mr. Doe," she said. "You don't mind if I leave early?" It sounded more like a command than a question.

Carr had his back to the snuggery and he did not dare to turn. But he heard Doe say, "What? No, I don't mind. Quite all right. We're very quiet."

The woman went into the snuggery, presumably to put on her hat and coat. Carr tore open the envelope. There was a very small negative, so small that he could not see whether it was the right one, and five letters all in the same handwriting. He glanced at one. It started 'My darling Hans' and was signed 'Phip'. Carr shut them in the book as he heard the woman's footsteps.

"Good-night, Mr. Doe," she said. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Good-night, Miss Benham."

Carr opened the book at random, hiding the letters, and pretended to be reading. "On September 5th at a meeting of the Allied High Command . . . "

The woman came behind him. "If you find what you are looking for," she said, "Mr. Doe will attend to you . . . " Carr turned and looked up at her. It may have been the effect of her spectacles, but she appeared to be mocking him. "Thank you," he said.

He waited for her to gather up her mail and go out of the shop. Then he removed the letters and the negative and slipped the envelope containing the pound notes into the flap.

As he did so, Mr. Doe came out of the snuggery and strolled apparently aimlessly towards the door. Carr inserted the book back in its place on the shelf and stood up. There was nothing more to be done except leave.

But the bookseller was now standing at the far end of the shelves between him and the door. "Am I right in thinking that you're Mr. Melville Carr?" he said. His voice shook with some emotion which was certainly not pleasure.

"You are right."

"Well, I hope you're proud of your handiwork," the bookseller said.

Carr's gaze went involuntarily towards the military history shelf. "I haven't the slightest idea of what you are talking about."

"No?" said the bookseller. "I suppose Jack Barrett never mentioned me. Never told you what I'd do for him. Till you came along."

Suddenly the memory recurred of 'a rich businessman'—Barrett never mentioned a name or the nature of the business—who'd promised to take him in as a junior partner, teach him the business, adopt him as a son, if only he would come and live with him. Carr had thought it was a trick to try and make him jealous.

"You killed Jack Barrett, Mr. Carr," the bookseller said, "as good as tied the noose around his neck and pulled it tight. And that's God's truth."

Carr looked at the bookseller in astonishment. He was rather like a mouse at bay. "Barrett killed himself because he was being blackmailed," Carr said. "You know that as well as I do. And who those blackmailers are, I suspect you know far better. And now, if you'll allow me to pass, I must go."

Mr. Doe stood on one side, but as Carr passed him, he muttered, "Murderer!"

As Carr went out, Hoey came in. He was wearing a shabby grey suit. "Excuse me," he said, "but have you by any chance got a book about a dog suitable for children?"

"Several," said the bookseller, walking over to the Juvenile Fiction shelves. "Is it any book about a dog, you want; or some particular one?"

"It's the one I had when I was twelve," Hoey said. "My little boy's going to be twelve and I want to give it to him."

"You don't know the name of it?" asked Mr. Doe.

"It had a blue cover," said Hoey. "It was a famous book. You must know it."

"Was it by Richard Jefferies?" asked Mr. Doe. "*Bevis*?"

"I don't *think* so." Hoey opened the copy which Mr. Doe had passed him. "No, it wasn't this. It was written in big print. And it wasn't as long as this."

"Jack London wrote a number of books about dogs. It wouldn't be one of those?"

Miss Benham came back into the shop. "I left my bag behind," she said. "I'm becoming so absent-minded." The bag was lying on the table where she had been working.

"It might be. Jack London was famous, wasn't he?"

"Would it be the *Call of the Wild*? Or *White Fang*?" Mr. Doe said. "But I think we sold those. But there's a copy of *Jerry of the Islands*."

Miss Benham picked up some folded maps. "And I forgot to put these back," she muttered.

"Is that a good one?" asked Hoey.

"It's a splendid book," Mr. Doe said. "I can let you have it for half a crown."

Miss Benham took her bag and the maps and disappeared behind the History shelves.

"No," said Hoey, "Now I think of it, I'm sure it was *Call of the Wild.* Yes, I'm quite sure it was."

Miss Benham appeared by the door. "Good-night once again, Mr. Doe."

"Well, thank you for all your trouble," Hoey said to the bookseller. He held the door open for Miss Benham and followed her out.

She walked down the passage towards the Charing Cross Road. The crowds were thinning now. The queue for the theatre was longer and a busker with a harmonica was playing *I've got the whole wide world.* Miss Benham turned round to see if she was being followed:

She wasn't.

Sergeant Hoey had nodded his head to Bridie, who was looking at the daggers in a curio-shop window, and it was Bridie who stood behind her in the queue for the bus and Bridie who got off the bus before her, when it came to the Edwardian block of flats where she lived. There he met Constable Adams. "Swiney's up there!" Adams said. "Arrived about a quarter of an hour ago."

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ALL UP IN JO'S PLACE

Sligger was lying on the sofa, reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It was a rotten book. After all that fuss, he'd expected something real sexy; and it wasn't sexy at all, just

dirty words, which spoilt it. " 'Lo Jo!" he said. "How you can read this muck? All accordin' to plan?"

"Couldn't have gone better," she said, throwing her hat on to the table. "But I'll never use the shop again. The timing's too tricky."

She opened the envelope. There were four packets, each containing one hundred pound notes. She threw him two of them. He kissed each one and put them in his breast pocket. "Here's something in exchange," he said, tossing her an envelope. There were photostats of Mortimer's letters, half a dozen prints of the photograph of Carr and Barrett and a print of the photograph he had taken of Mortimer crying and Carr with his hand on Mortimer's leg. "I'm goin' to work that one up a bit," he said. "With a bit of souping I can make it real dirty."

"Not now, you can't," she said sharply. "Have you sold the Lambretta?"

"Yup. I'm all packed. Ticket on the midnight bus. I still think we ought to have collected from the others before we left though."

"You're too greedy. Fullbrook won't run away during the next three weeks. Nor will Mandrake and Calloway." She went out and came back with a small suitcase and started to pack the papers from her desk. "God knows how I'll get the eleven o'clock boat train tomorrow. I wish we'd had more notice."

"Don't flap, Jo."

"I don't like Carr," she said firmly. "He's not like the others. He's too damned innocent. Now, you know what you've got to do in York?"

"Snap the Archbish with a barmaid." Sligger grinned. "Trouble is they don't get paid enough. Is it worthwhile?"

"I like York," Miss Benham said. "It'll make a change. Besides I've got some County contacts."

The bell rang.

Sligger jumped up. "Who the hell's that?"

Miss Benham went to the window and pulled aside the curtain. She could see no car in the street.

The front bell rang again and someone hammered the knocker.

"You'd better take the fire-escape," she said, quietly. She took him into the kitchen and without turning on the light unlocked the door on to the fire-escape. "Good luck. See you in York."

"Open in the name of the Law," a voice shouted through the letter box. "We don't want to have to break this door down."

"Coming," she shouted. "Just wait a moment."

She remembered the money, ran into the lounge, snatched it up, ran into the lavatory and lifted the lid of the cistern. It would be easy enough to dry them again. She undid the buttons of her shirt blouse and was doing them up with one hand as she opened the door.

"What is all this about?" she asked.

"We want to search this flat, Miss Benham," Inspector Harris said. "We have a warrant."

She looked at Carr. "You were in the shop when I left," she said. "Are you a policeman?"

"No," said Carr, "just one of the men you and Swiney were blackmailing."

"Swiney? What are you talking about?"

Harris pushed past her, leaving Bridie to cope with her. "Take my advice, miss, and save all that for the jury." He strode through the flat, flinging back doors, opening cup-

boards. When he came to the kitchen, he went out on the fire escape. "Hallo there, Adams," he shouted. "You get him?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I take him to the station?"

"No, bring him up."

He walked back to the hall, where Miss Benham was standing at the entrance to the lounge. "Since you don't know Swiney, we're bringing him up to introduce you," he said. "Now where's that money?"

"I repeat. I don't know what you're talking about."

Carr looked at her with curiosity. Somebody as obstinate, as incapable of recognising defeat, was a prodigy. He looked round the furnished flat trying to find some key to her personality. There was nothing. He strolled through to her bedroom. There were suitcases half packed on the bed. So they had been right. She was ready to move on. Lying face down in one of the cases was a silver picture frame. He turned it over. It was a face he knew from his Cheltenham childhood, the square jaw, the hooded eyes, the Admiral's uniform. Roddy Benham of the *Vengeance*, who won a posthumous V.C. at Singapore for bravery amounting to suicidal folly.

Suddenly it came to him. The sour woman in the other room was Josephine Benham, the adult edition of that romantic teen-age girl who had fallen passionately in love with Stainer. Carr had never seen them together, but Stainer had said, 'She feels about me the way I feel about you. What a mess!'

What a mess indeed! He remembered now. There was a scandal. Something to do with a farmer's son, a shot-gun, the charge of manslaughter. She was acquitted but old Lady Benham wouldn't have her in the home again. The

Admiral of course had died years before; and Lady Benham died not long after, leaving all her money to a Sailors' Home.

Carr put the photograph back, face downwards in the suitcase. The daughter had her father's sternness, but deployed in a different field. 'The only good German is a dead German,' the old man used to say. For 'German' the daughter read 'Homo'. Perhaps she didn't even consider herself a criminal; merely an avenging angel who had to make a living.

Carr went back into the lounge, but he did not look at Josephine Benham. A constable had just come in, with his left wrist securely handcuffed to Swiney's right. In his right hand, the constable had two of the packets of notes.

Harris took them. "So you split fifty-fifty?" He looked first at Swiney and then at Josephine Benham. "You'd better tell us where they are, miss."

"I've found them," Bridie said, coming in. His jacket was off and his right sleeve rolled above the elbow. He put the dripping wad on the table.

"Fine," Harris said. "Take these two away and charge 'em at the station. I want to have a word with Mr. Carr."

Now, thought Carr, now it's coming; the day of reckoning. He looked round and saw that there was half a bottle of whisky on the sideboard. As soon as they were alone, he said, "Would you condone a spot of larceny, Inspector?"

Harris looked at the bottle. "Not for me, sir, as you know. But I don't think Miss Benham will have a chance of drinking it for some years. If you poured it out in the kitchen, I wouldn't have seen you, would I?"

When Carr came back, Harris had at least relaxed enough to light his pipe. "We want to get this case as simple as

possible. There's no sense in confusing the issue with unnecessary detail. But of course, I have to have the relevant documents."

Carr took the envelope out of his pocket, and handed it to the Inspector. Harris read through Mortimer's letters. "My God! What a drip!" he said, "but just what I want." He held the negative up to the light. "We shan't be needing this," he said. "I should burn it if I were you, sir."

It was what Carr had been hoping in his heart of hearts that Harris would propose. But now it had happened, he realised that it was impossible for him to accept, even though Mortimer had stung him for £50 when he was being blackmailed for only £20.

"I know what you're doing, Inspector. But I don't think it's fair on that poor devil Mortimer. I know he's a bit of a crook and he's guilty of having broken the law as it stands, but God knows he's paid for that in what he's gone through. Well, I'm not guilty; and if I stand up straight, I'm prepared to risk the loss of reputation."

"You've got to think of your wife, sir," Carr said.

"I've thought of that. But luckily I've found out that I've got a wife who's a real fighter."

"It's a risk *I*'d prefer not to take sir. I'd like to see you on the bench one day and I don't think there'd be a chance of that, if we cited you."

"That's for me to decide," Carr said.

Harris knocked out his pipe. "Perfectly true, sir. But this little notebook, which I found in Miss Benham's desk, might help you to come to a right decision. It's a sort of account book." He opened it at a page which was headed P.M. which obviously stood for Phip Mortimer.

It began in 1957, with regular weekly payments of £5.

Then in December there were no payments for a month, but the single entry HENRY S. Payments resumed on January 15th and continued to September. There was a gap until December when a payment of £20 was made "Lord F." That was obviously a time when Mortimer ran away and it was three months before they caught up with him.

Carr flicked through the other pages. Henry's page started in December, 1957. Lord F's in December, 1958. Mortimer had been paying off Benham and Swiney in kind. Mandrake had been pulled in in August, 1959, Calloway in March, 1960 and J.B. five months later.

"Your saying Mortimer was a bit of a crook was an understatement, sir," said the Inspector. Carr handed the notebook back. "You're right," Carr agreed. "But in that case I don't quite see how I come into the case at all."

"It's all perfectly simple, sir," the Inspector said. "Mr. Mortimer was being blackmailed. He approached you for advice. You informed the police and together we succeeded in catching Benham and Swiney. Among their papers we discovered evidence which proved that they had also been blackmailing Henry the barber and Jack Barrett. We can charge them in Barrett's case with receipt of stolen goods. That will enable us to recover the money Barrett stole from Comfort & King. Oh, I think that'll make a very nice tidy case, sir."

"And I suppose Mortimer will then be charged under the Indecency laws?"

"That isn't for me to say, sir," Harris said. "But as far as I'm concerned, whatever Mortimer gets, he richly deserves." He looked round the room. "There's a lot here I want to look at before I go," he said. "Quite a lot of stuff we won't need."

"I'd like to telephone," Carr said.

"Of course. Is it private?"

"Not particularly. I'm just going to tell my wife I'm on the way home."

"I want to look at the bedroom anyway." Harris went out, closing the door behind him.

Carr dialled the number. It rang once and then stopped. "This is Laura Carr speaking." She must have been standing by it. For how long?

"This is Laura Carr's husband speaking."

"Oh darling!"

"It's all over, my love."

"What's happened? I've been so worried."

"It's going to be all right. I'm coming home now."

"Thank God!" she said.

"And thank you, too," he answered.

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